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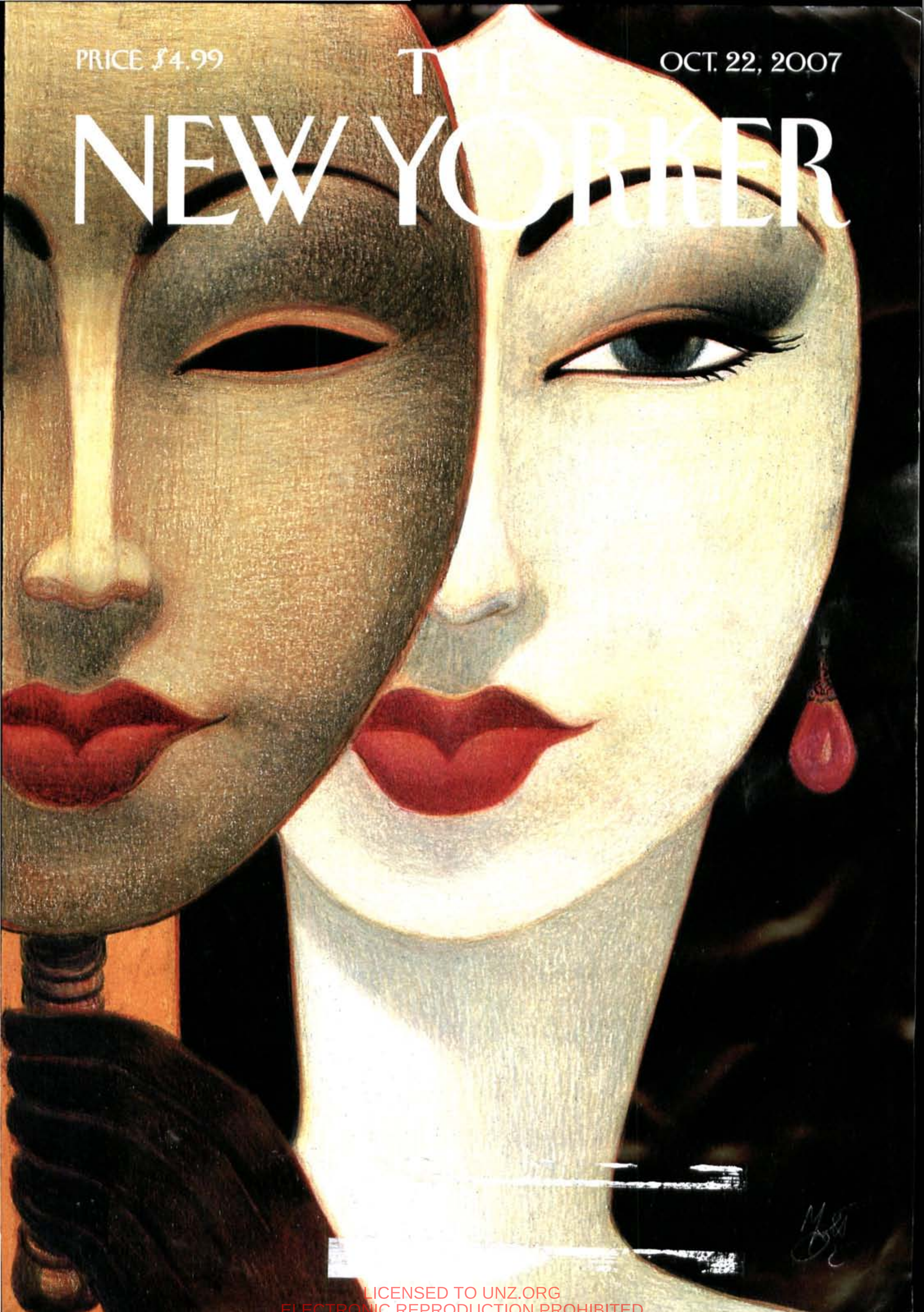
THE NEW YORKER

OCT. 22, 2007



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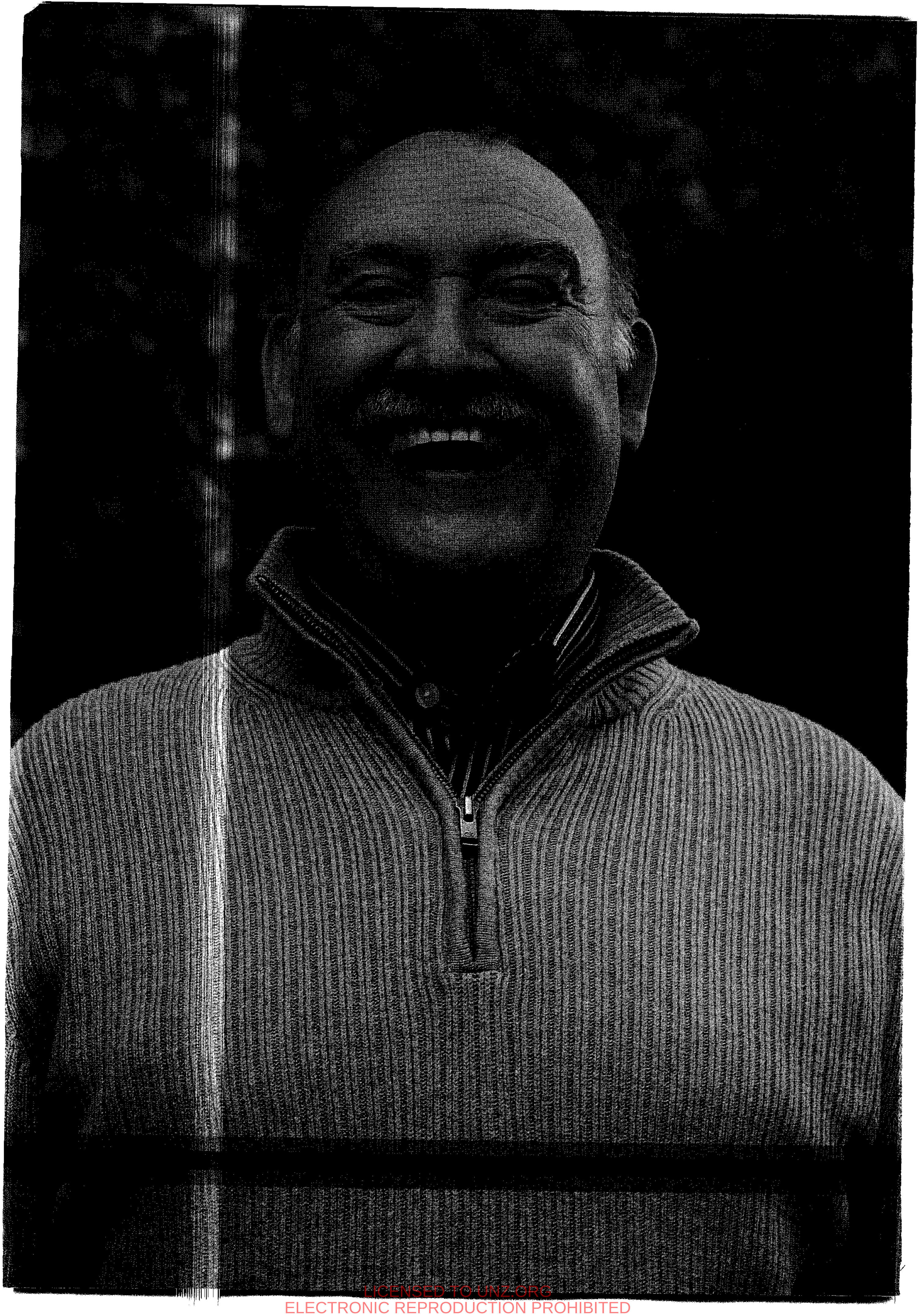

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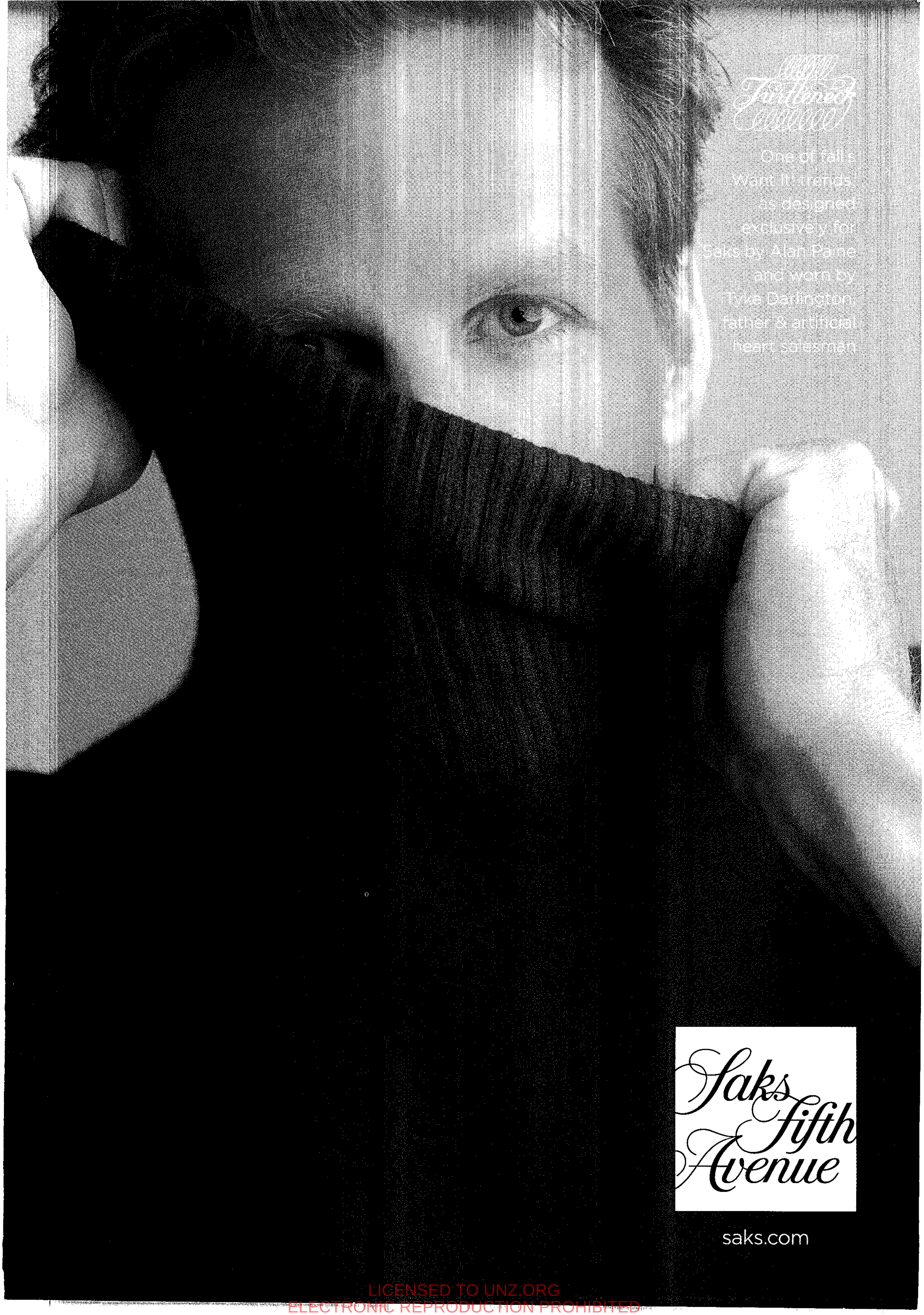
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THE NEW YORKER
THE ARTS ISSUE

OCTOBER 22, 2007

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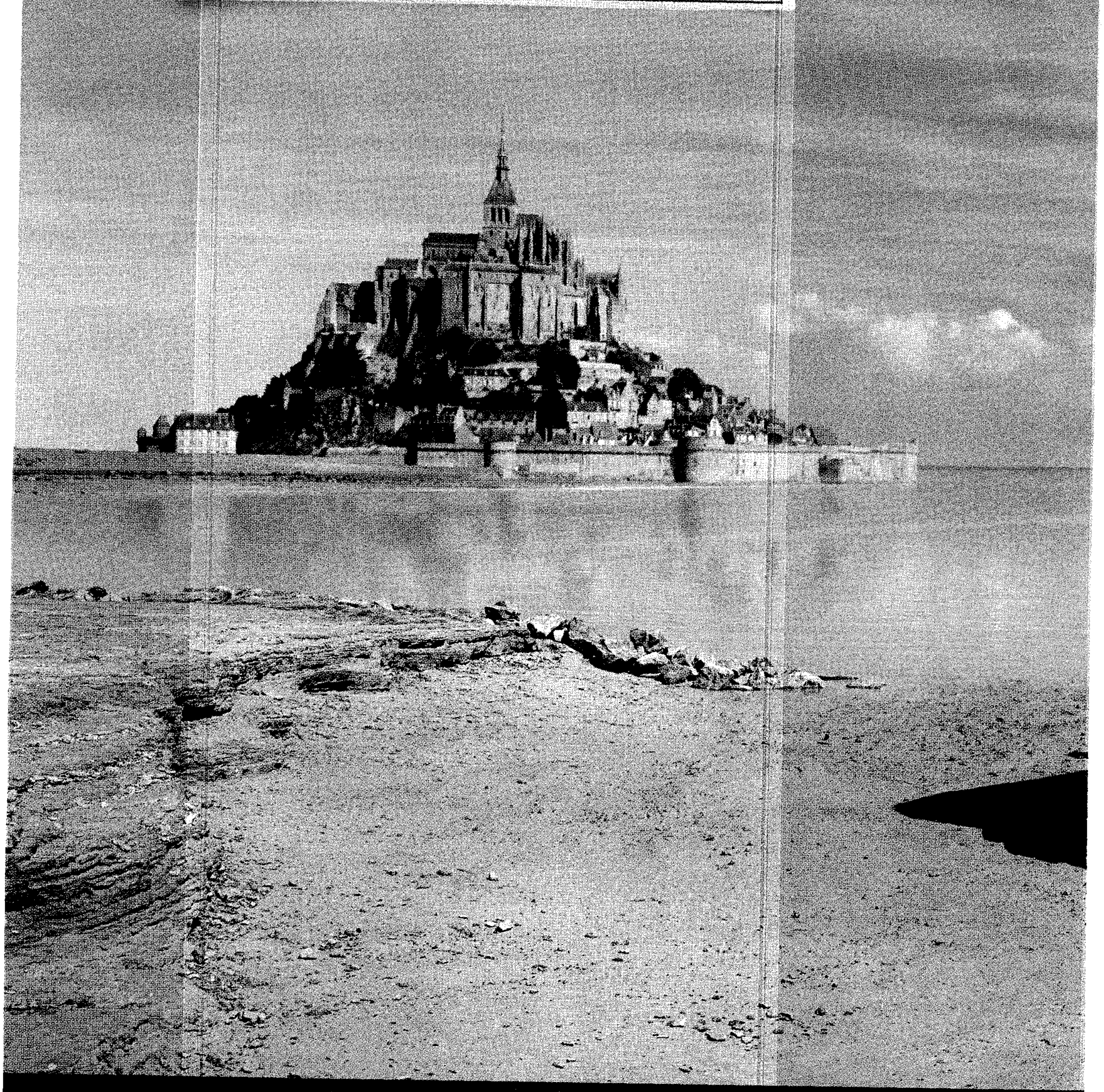

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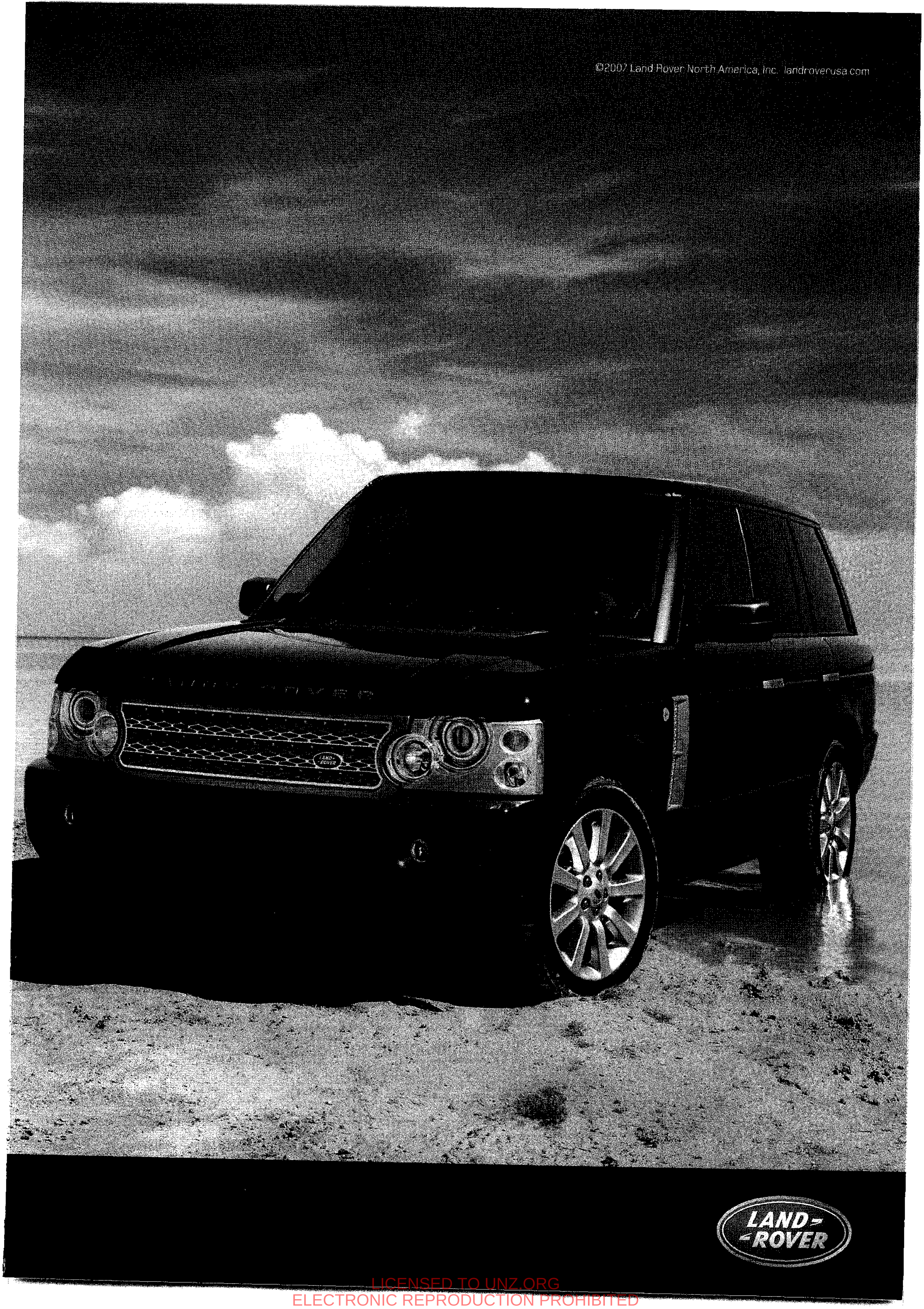

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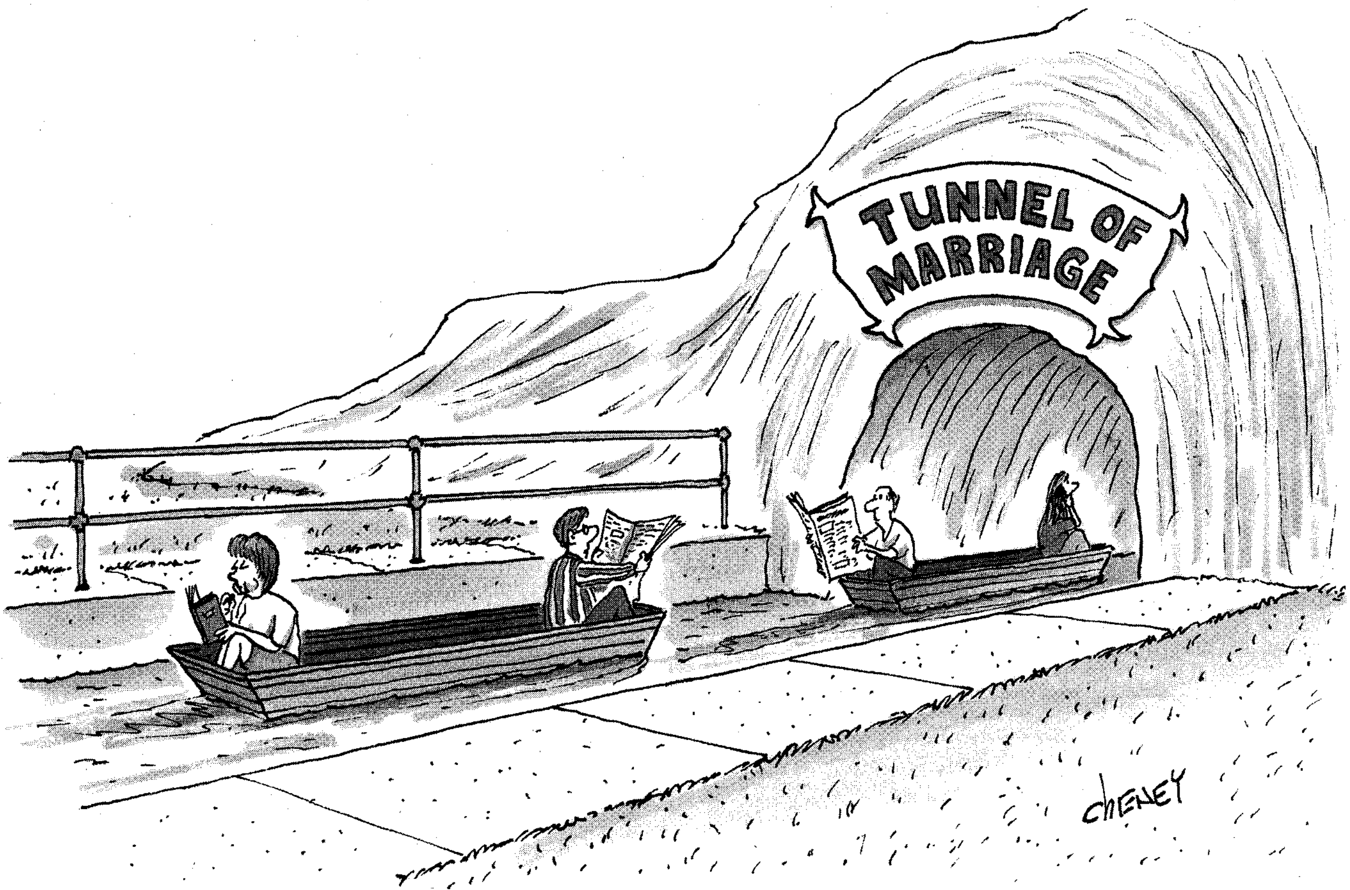

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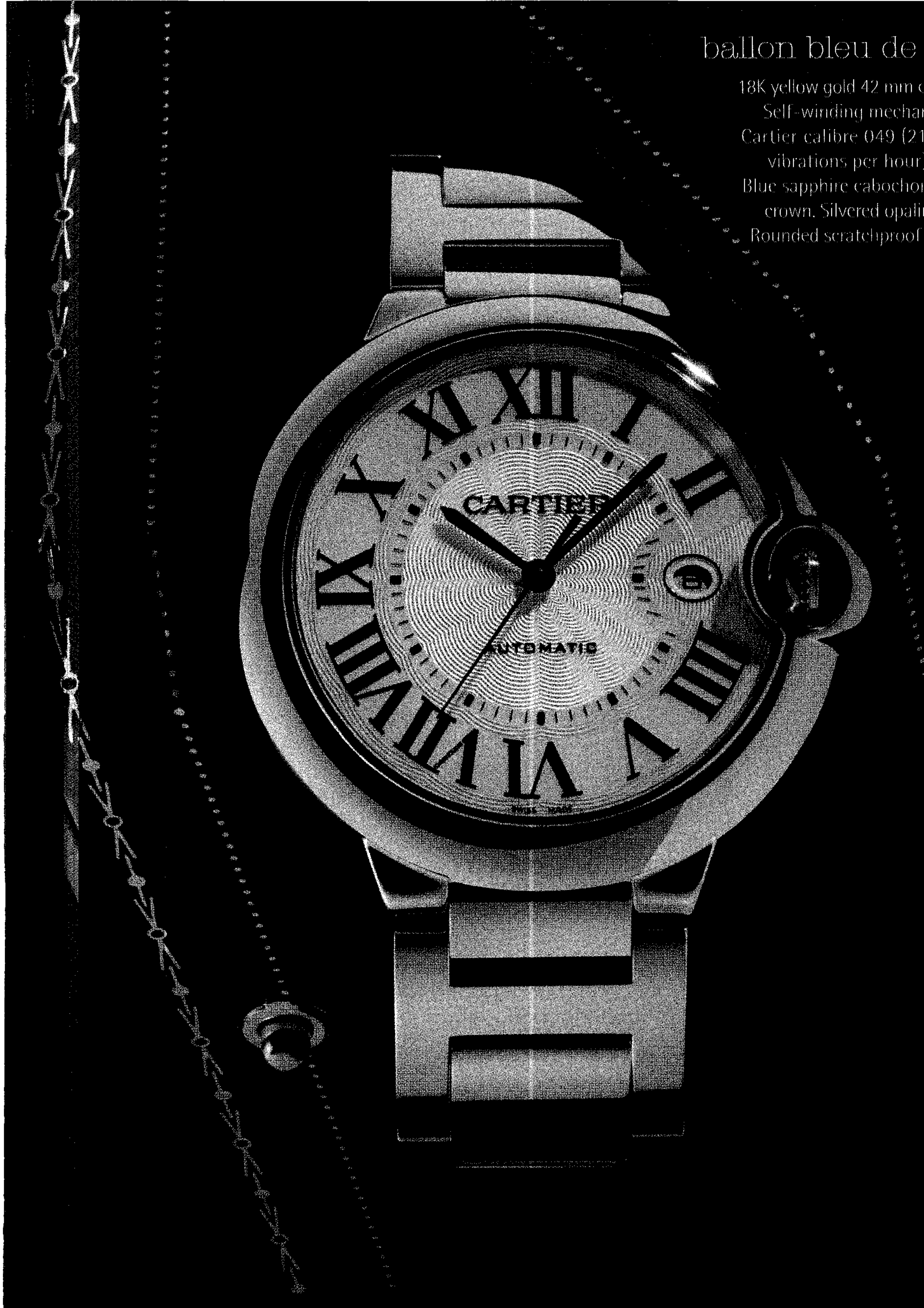
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Margaret Talbot ("Stealing Life," p. 150), a staff writer, is a Senior Fellow at the New America Foundation.

Lawrence Wright (Comment, p. 57) has written seven books, including "The Looming Tower: Al-Qaeda and the Road to 9/11."

Adam Gopnik ("The Corrections," p. 66) has been writing for the magazine since 1986. His books include "Paris to the Moon" and "Through the Children's Gate: A Home in New York."

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Walton Ford (Illustration, p. 157) lives in Massachusetts. A book of his animal watercolors, entitled "Pancha Tantra," is coming out in December.

Franz Wright (Poem, p. 158) was awarded the 2004 Pulitzer Prize for poetry for "Walking to Martha's Vineyard." His most recent collection is "Earlier Poems."

Alex Ross ("The Well-Tempered Web," p. 78) is the magazine's music critic. His book "The Rest Is Noise: Listening to the Twentieth Century" comes out this week.

Rebecca Mead ("Man Behind the Curtain," p. 138) has contributed to the magazine since 1997. Her book "One Perfect Day: The Selling of the American Wedding" came out in May.

Andrei Platonov (Fiction, p. 117), a Russian writer of novels, stories, and plays, died in 1951. The complete text of "Among Animals and Plants" is included in the collection "Soul and Other Stories," to be published in December.

Jack Gilbert (Poem, p. 169) won the 2005 National Book Critics Circle Award for poetry for his book "Refusing Heaven."

Lauren Collins ("Voice of the Veil," p. 86) is the deputy editor of The Talk of the Town.

Thomas Mallon (Books, p. 170) is the author of seven novels, including "Fellow Travelers."

Paul Goldberger (The Sky Line, p. 184) holds the Joseph Urban Chair in Design and Architecture at the New School.

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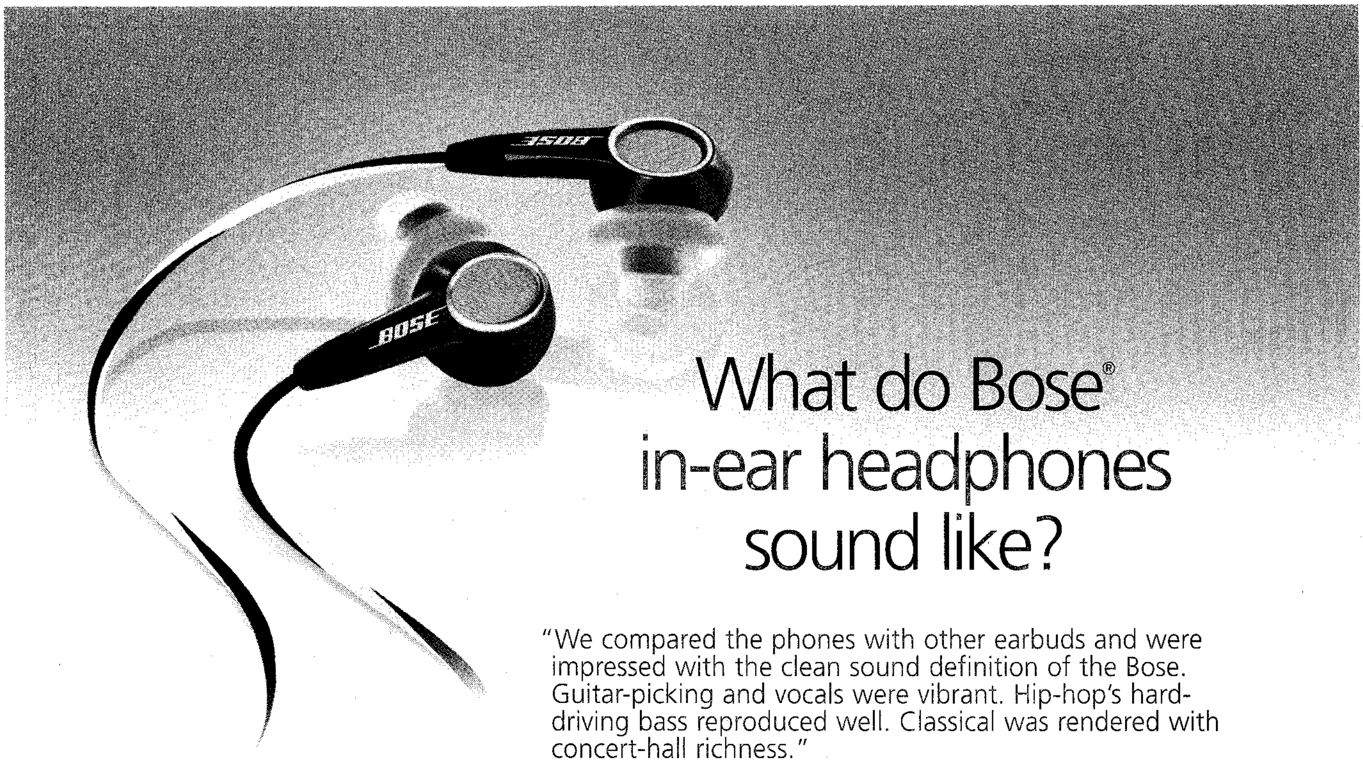
Video from The New Yorker Festival, featuring *Seymour M. Hersh*, Judd Apatow and Seth Rogen, a parkour exhibition, and more. / Audio: *Sasha Frere-Jones* talks about race and indie rock. / Q. & A.: The translator *Robert Chandler* discusses *Andrei Platonov*. / A slide show of art work by Shirin Neshat. / Blogs by *George Packer*, *Hendrik Hertzberg*, *Dana Goodyear*, and *Sasha Frere-Jones*. / From the archives: *Louis Menand* on Doris Lessing, *Jonathan Franzen* on "Peanuts," and coverage of the Iraq war. / Animated cartoons, the caption contest, and a list of *New Yorker* events.



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TRAVELLING MAN

I was disappointed to find some basic misconceptions about Jack Kerouac's intent in Louis Menand's reappraisal of "On the Road" (A Critic at Large, October 1st). It is just as reductive to now say that his novel is really about the desire of the male protagonists to lead a conventional, middle-class-family life as it was, back when the novel was first published, to define Kerouac's message as "everything for kicks." The more interesting and complicated truth is that the novel is actually about the psychological limbo of existing between these two contradictory impulses (a dilemma that Kerouac wrestled with every day of his anguished life) and about the desperate need to find God (the elusive father whom Sal Paradise and Dean Moriarty keep searching for) in a postwar world where God had been pronounced dead. It is also a mistake to see Kerouac's breaking away from the conventional Thomas Wolfe-inspired prose of his early work into the voice of "On the Road" as a penance. It was the liberation he had long been painstakingly seeking in his efforts to renounce "fiction and fear"—a step that led to the even more truly spontaneous, high-wire writing of the novels that followed.

Joyce Johnson
New York City

Kerouac surely does not deserve credit for "[making] America a subject for literary fiction," and thus "de-Europeaniz[ing] the novel for American writers," as Menand writes. That honor, as Ernest Hemingway famously observed, belongs to Mark Twain's "Huckleberry Finn," and Menand actually helps us recognize the extent to which Kerouac's novel is an automotive-era update of Twain's masterwork—with the highway in the role of the river. He notes that the Beats' car (like Huck and Jim's raft) is a distinctively "male space"—a conveyance that permits its occupants "to be together without the need to answer questions about why they want to be together." Menand all but names the crucial affinity between the two novels when he describes Kerouac's excited discovery, in a letter written by his pal Neal Cassady, of just the style for a road novel—a style marked by the "vernacular directness and narrative propulsion he was looking for." It is a version of the de-Europeanized style that Mark Twain created with one inspired stroke when he chose an illiterate fourteen-year-old boy, the son of the town drunk, as the narrator of his own road novel.

Leo Marx
Professor Emeritus of American Cultural History
Massachusetts Institute of Technology
Cambridge, Mass.

PROFIT AND HEALTH

To Hendrik Hertzberg's excellent perspective on the political state of health-care issues, I would add a moral and educational consideration: In our national media conversation on health care, have we heard one sincere word on how to be healthy, beyond token recommendations to abide by our grade-school five food groups, quit smoking, and get lots of exercise? (Comment, October 1st) No—it's all about insurance, and insurance is about guaranteeing payment of exorbitantly inflated medical costs, which is about pouring money into the pharmaceutical and "health" practitioner combine. The hushed goal of medicine these days is not really to heal but to prop patients up on drugs until every last per-capita dollar has been squeezed out of the system and our pickled remains are hauled off to a final resting place. Small wonder that the United States was recently ranked thirty-seventh in health care around the world.

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HOW TO RUN

As Richard Nixon reportedly observed, in order to win the Presidency as a Republican, the aspiring candidate should run for the nomination from the right and then run back to the center for the general election; Ryan Lizza, in his ar-

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ticle on Hillary Clinton, seems to be asking whether the mirror opposite is true for Democrats ("The Legacy Problem," September 17th). If so, the problem for Hillary during this nomination phase of the process is that Bill governed not from the center but from the right. As a conservative, I was only too happy to see Bill Clinton usher in a cornucopia of our side's core values: free trade, a balanced budget, welfare reform, the Defense of Marriage Act, and the Telecommunications Act. I can only hope that Hillary is able to overcome this first hurdle and then, having ascended to the Presidency, that she governs as Bill did.

Tony Kondaks
Mesa, Ariz.

A BETTER LEGACY

Lizzie Widdicombe pays tribute to the old St. Clare's Hospital by recalling some of the boldface names who were treated there, but a lesser-known aspect of the hospital may be more remarkable: since the mid nineteen-eighties, it sheltered the Spellman Center for H.I.V.-Related Diseases (The Talk of the Town, September 17th). Spellman—at the time the largest designated AIDS Center in New York State, when AIDS was a truly fearsome and untreatable disease—treated H.I.V.-infected prisoners, drug addicts, poor gay men, and the homeless. It was not unusual for a patient who listed the Port Authority bus station as his home address to share a room with a former member of the Metropolitan Opera Chorus who had no medical insurance. Stories about the medical travails of the rich and famous can be found in the lore of almost any urban emergency room. Stories about St. Clare's unheralded AIDS patients are inestimably unique.

Daniel Baxter, M.D.
Gaborone, Botswana

PAYING TRIBUTE

For those of us who lived through the horrifying experience of the Second World War, the value of Ken Burns's film "The War," which Nancy Franklin reviews, is that every detail, the best and the worst, is precious to us (On Television, September 24th). As a veteran of the Burma campaign, I have been deeply gratified by Burns's painstaking effort to convey the full story of our experience, both as soldiers and as a whole nation of sufferers. We were utterly unprepared for that war. The way America embraced that task, on the battlefields and at home, is a magnificent story, and our alternating feelings of failure, desperation, shame, doubt, grief, abandonment, success, pride, and, finally, triumph have needed a full retelling.

The Reverend Clarke K. Oler
Pasadena, Calif.

FASHION POLICE

Contrary to James Surowiecki's argument, there is no such thing as "the piracy paradox," but there is a great deal of piracy injustice (The Financial Page, September 24th). All designers, emerging and experienced, are vulnerable to knockoff artists. As the president of the Council of Fashion Designers of America, I support the Design Piracy Prohibition Act, which will prevent knockoff artists from stealing designs straight from the runway and producing copies before the originals even reach stores. Great American fashion design, not cheap imitations, should be available at every price point. Today, it is, because retailers like Target, Kohl's, and J. C. Penney hire designers to create collections for their stores. This protects designers, and insures fashion at affordable prices for consumers. The proposed act pending in Congress would encourage this trend by providing a minimum of three years of design protection for unique and original designs. Europe has provided as many as twenty-five years of protection to its designers, who, as a result, are flourishing. The short-term protection that we are lobbying for offers support to creative designers while preserving the flow of trends and styles at the heart of fashion design.

Diane von Furstenberg
New York City

•

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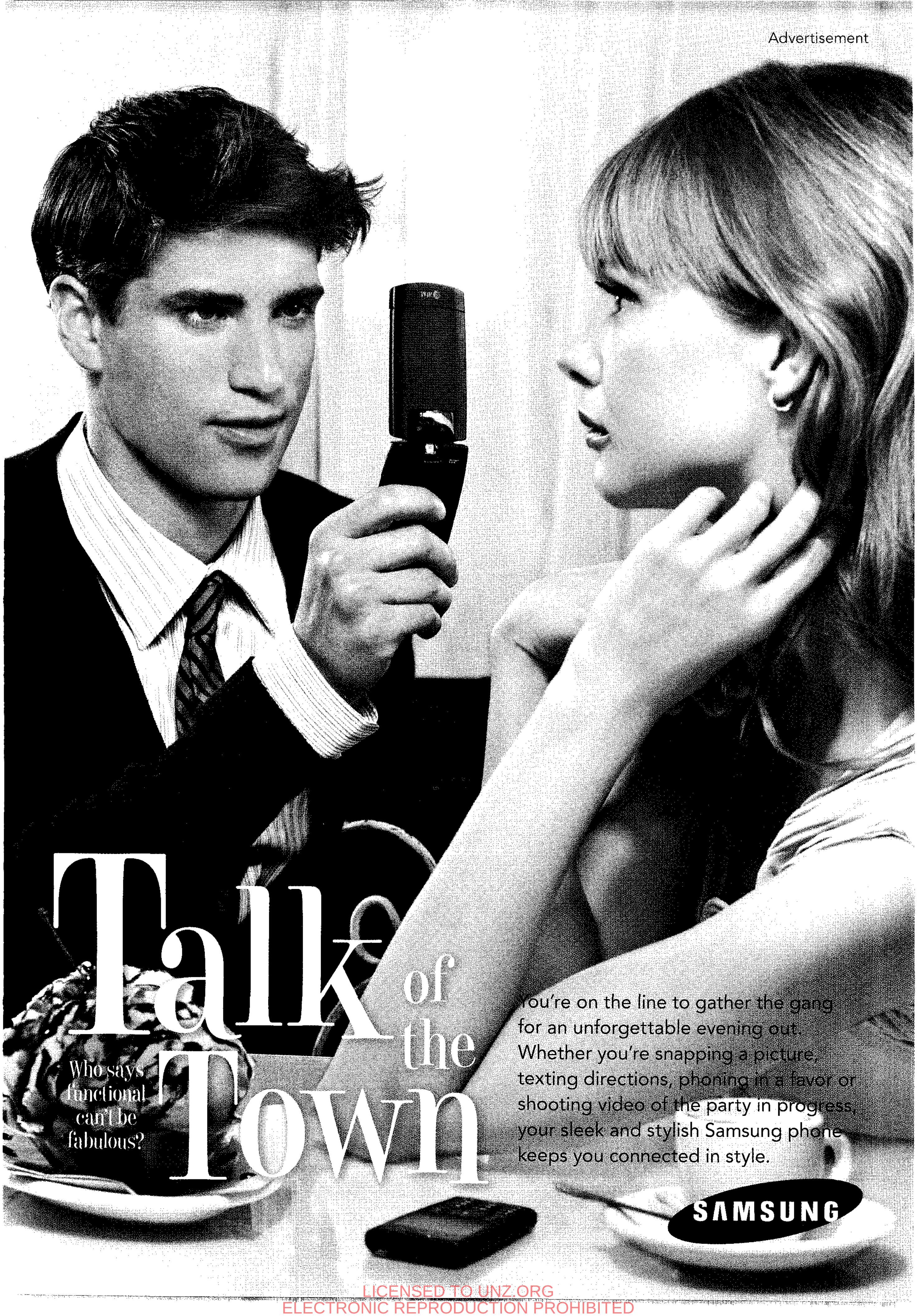

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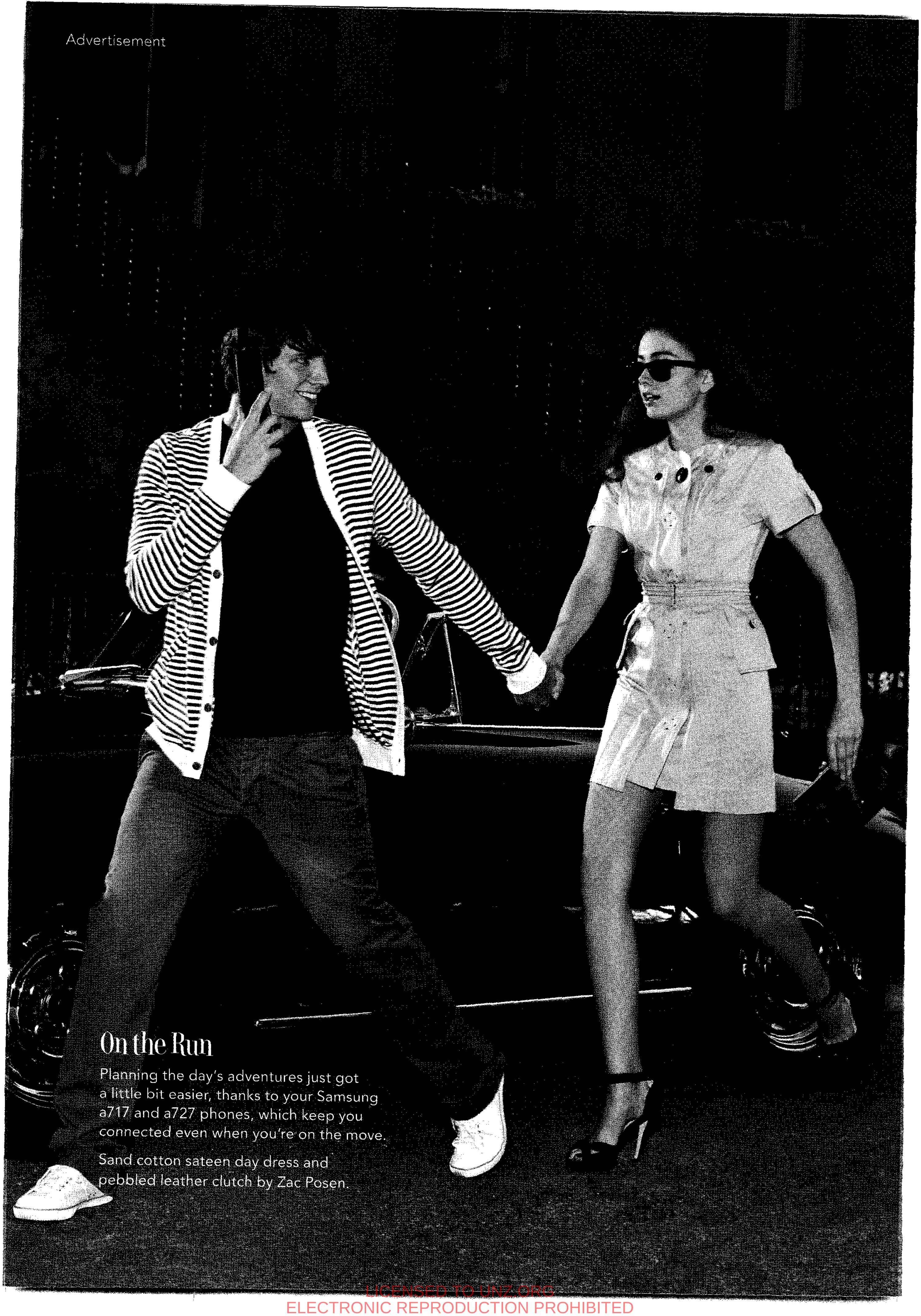

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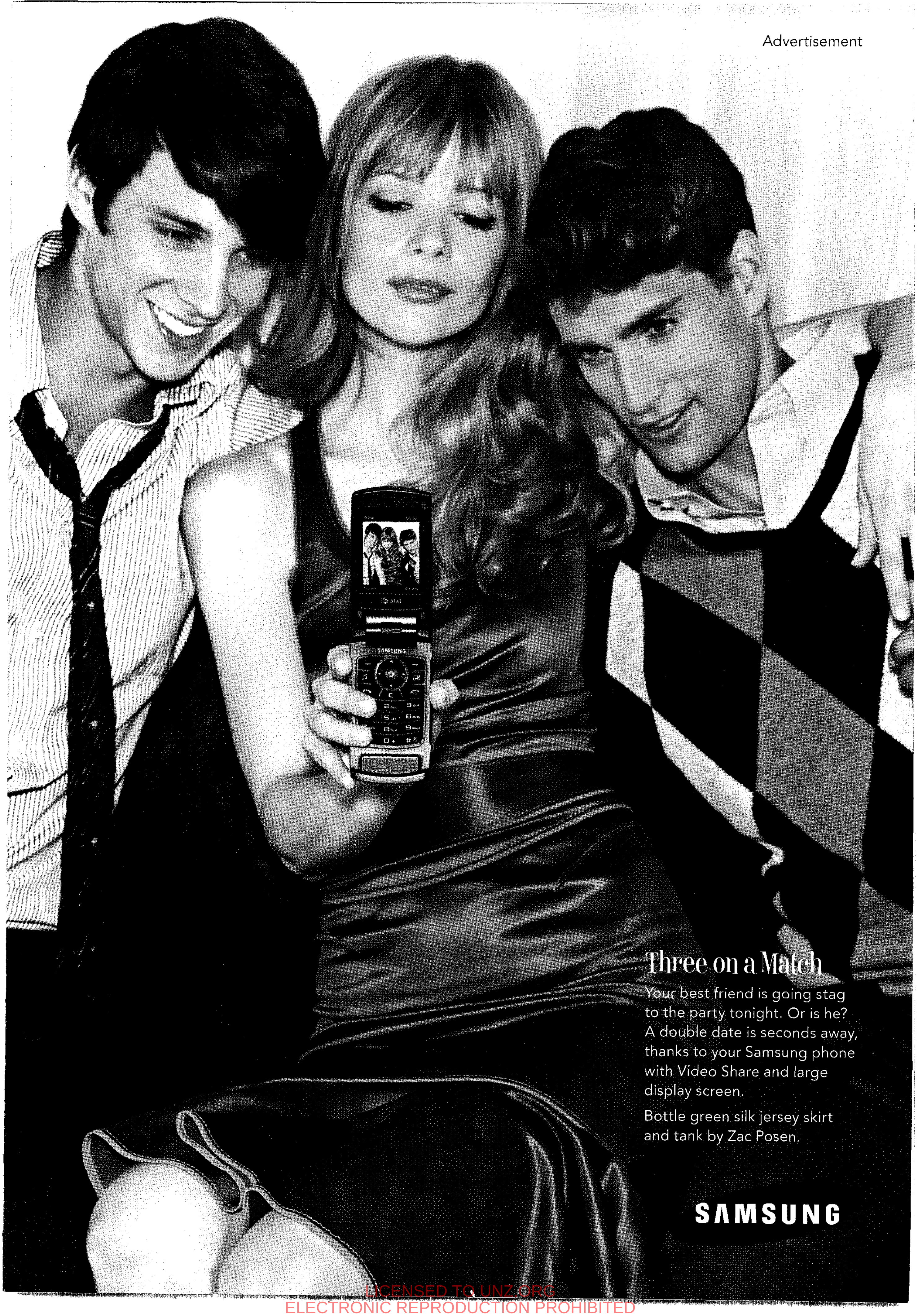

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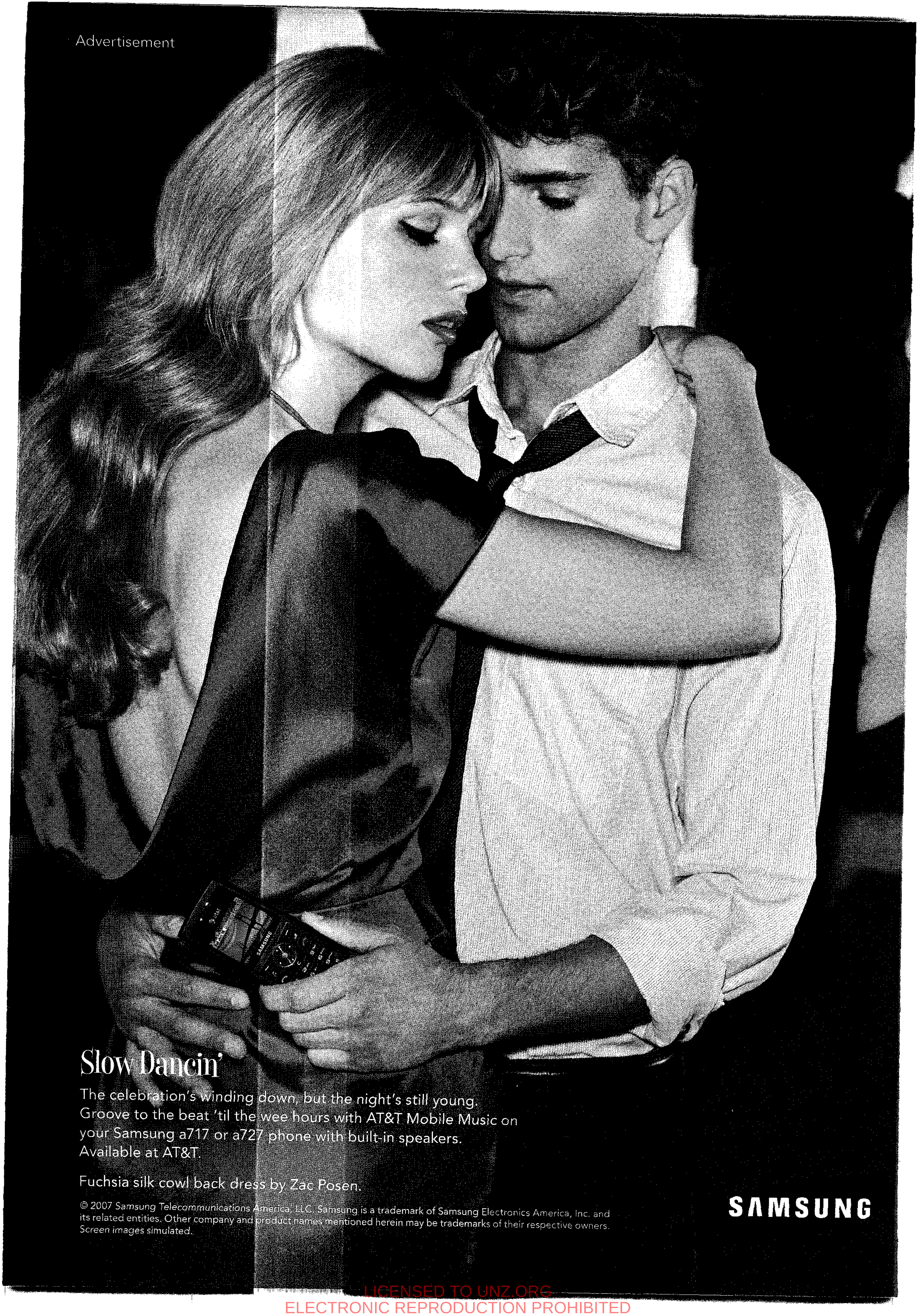

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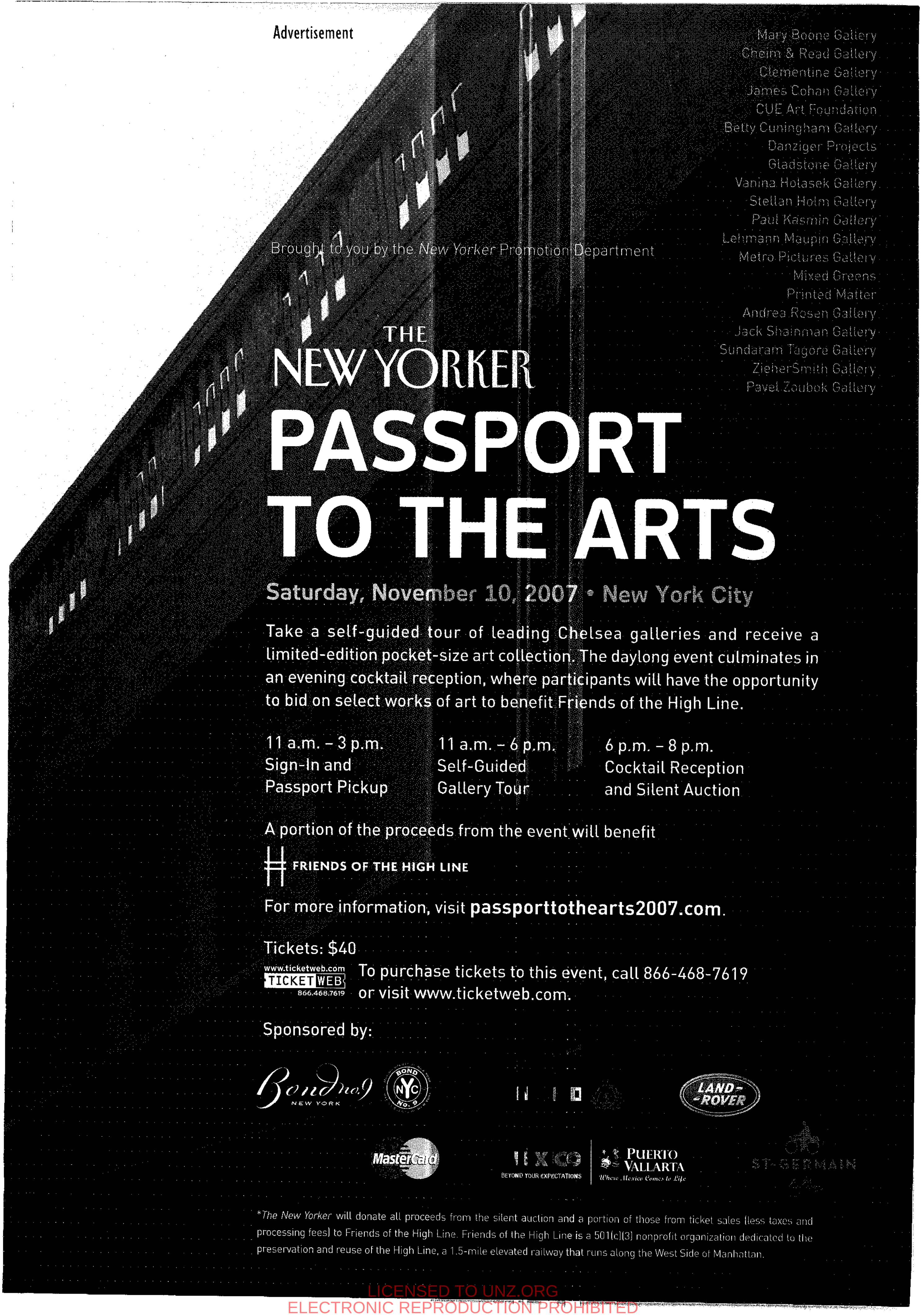

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GOINGS ON ABOUT TOWN

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21	22	23	17	18	19	20

THIS WEEK

THE THEATRE
MONSTER HIT

Mel Brooks and his team from "The Producers"—the director-choreographer Susan Stroman and the writer Thomas Meehan—are back with "Young Frankenstein," a musical based on Brooks's 1974 film. Word from Seattle, where the show was in tryouts, is that it's vonderful. (See page 27.)

NIGHT LIFE
CROSSTOWN TRAFFIC

Three years ago, Experience Hendrix, the company that controls the estate of the late guitar hero, put together a small tribute-concert tour featuring Buddy Guy, Kenny Wayne Shepherd, and Hubert Sumlin, as well as the Hendrix-band veterans Mitch Mitchell, on drums, and Billy Cox, on bass, and others. That tour stayed on the West Coast, but this week it comes to the Beacon Theatre for two nights. (See page 30.)

ART
BY A THREAD

In the seventeenth century, the tapestry industry gave painters a run for their money, thanks to the lavish dwellings of kings, popes, and noblemen. The Metropolitan Museum of Art brings together forty rare examples—including a Flemish weaving designed by Peter Paul Rubens—in "Tapestry in the Baroque: Threads of Splendor." (See page 34.)

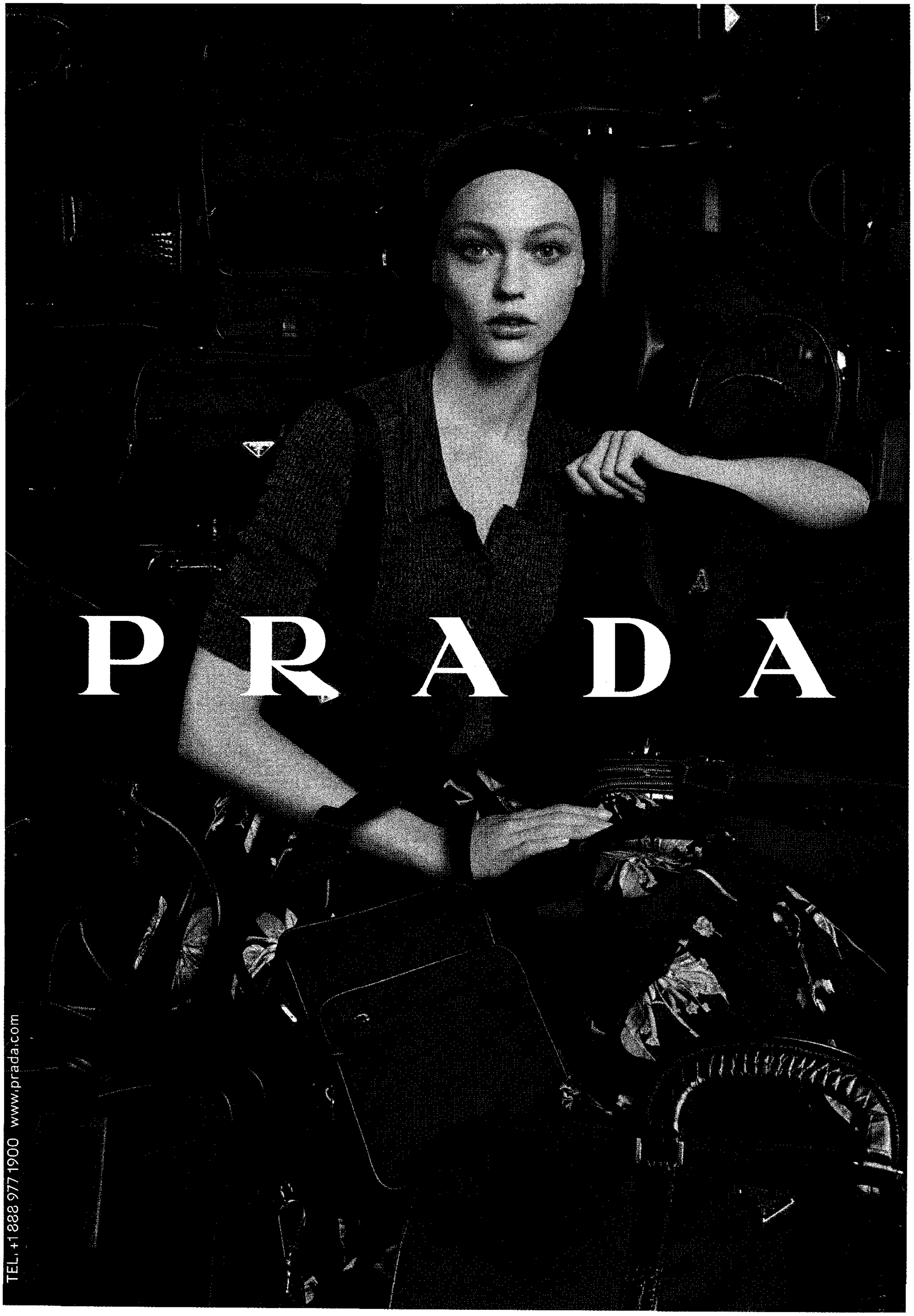
CLASSICAL MUSIC
INTO THE NEW

"Composer Portraits," the most vital of George Steel's various programs at Miller Theatre, is in full swing. This week, the Manhattan Sinfonietta, conducted by Jeffrey Milarsky, offers "Hunts and Forms," a searing fifty-minute masterwork by the German neo-Romantic Wolfgang Rihm. (See page 46.)

MOVIES
BEYOND MARILYN

Andy Warhol's films, at Moving Image, combined Hollywood and home movies, emotion and put-on. "Kiss," from 1963, turns couples he knew into movie stars; "Blow Job" is the apotheosis of the reaction shot. Edie Sedgwick, Susan Sontag, and Salvador Dali all make appearances, which is the point. (See page 52.)

"Fuerzabruta," from the creators of "De La Guarda." Photograph by Landon Nordeman.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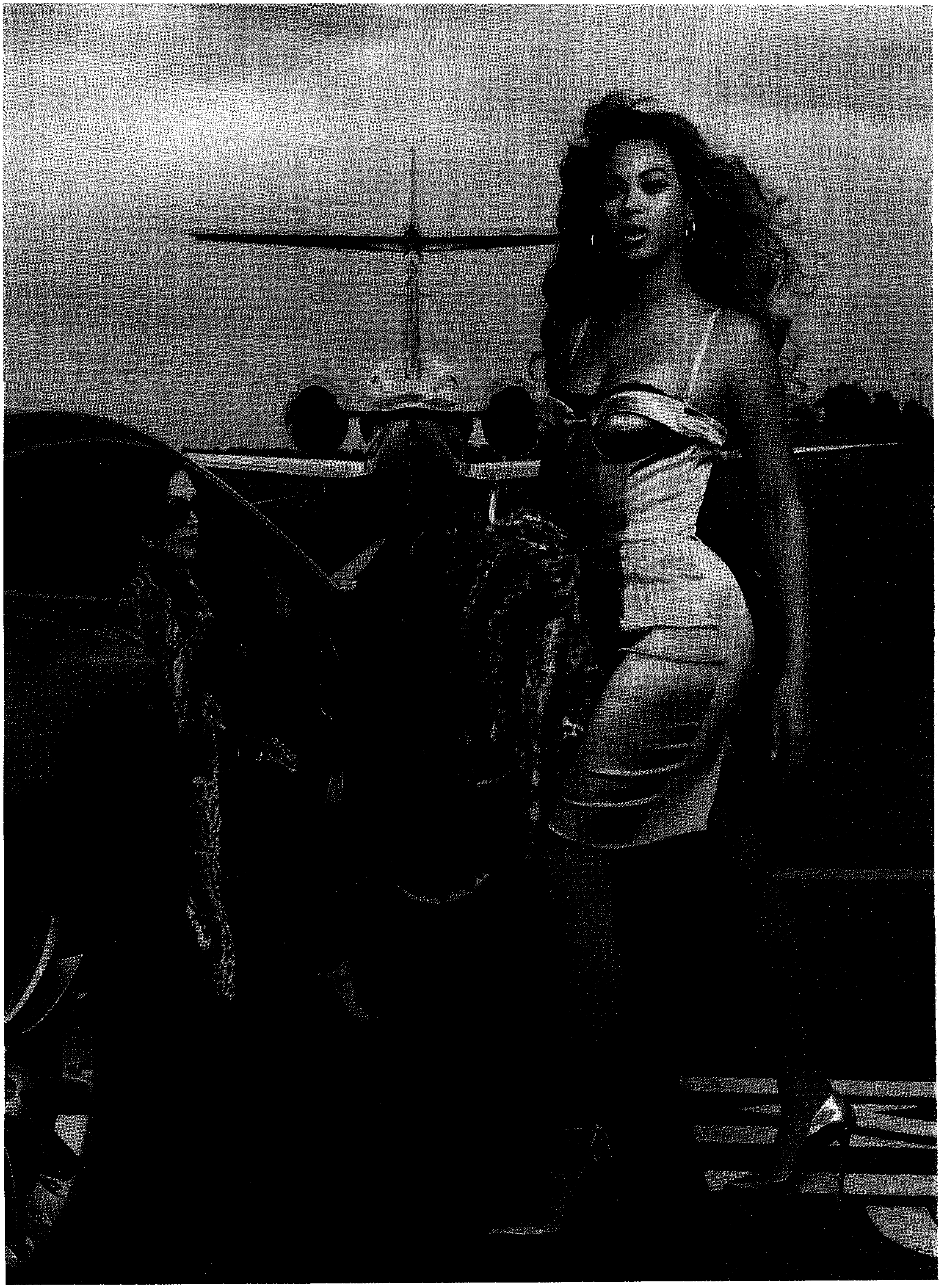

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Perfect day Lounging in the Sun, on a Boat, in the middle of nowhere, with the people I love.

Most unusual gift Rhinestone Studded Pedicure Toe spacers

Recent impulse buy Lorraine Schwartz Diamond Monkeys. (See no Evil, Hear no evil, speak no evil)

Retail therapy Shopping with my mom at Designer and Boutique Stores

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GONE ON A WORLD TOUR WITHOUT YOU?

or

ARE YOU ALERTED WHEN A
SUSPICIOUS CHARGE APPEARS?

ARE YOU RUNNING AROUND TRYING TO
RETURN SOMETHING, ONLY TO BE TOLD NO?

or

ARE YOU ABLE TO RETURN IT
AND GET ON WITH YOUR LIFE?

ARE YOU WORRIED THAT YOUR STOLEN
WATCH WAS IRREPLACEABLE?

or

ARE YOU SECURE THAT YOUR NEW
PURCHASES ARE PROTECTED?

ARE YOU SPENDING MORE TIME WORRYING THAN SHOPPING?

or

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THE THEATRE
OPENINGS AND PREVIEWS

Please call the phone number listed with the theatre for timetables and ticket information.

BLACK WATCH
St. Ann's Warehouse and National Theatre of Scotland present this drama, about a Scottish regiment on its final tour in Iraq. John Tiffany directs. Opens Oct. 20. (38 Water St. 718-254-8779.)

A BRONX TALE
The Broadway début of the one-man drama, written by Chazz Palminteri in 1989, about his childhood in the Bronx. Palminteri stars; Jerry Zaks directs. In previews. (Walter Kerr, 219 W. 48th St. 212-239-6200.)

THE BROTHERS SIZE
The Public presents the première of a play by Tarell Alvin McCraney, about two brothers, one a mechanic and the other a parolee. Tea Alagic directs. Previews begin Oct. 23. (425 Lafayette St. 212-967-7555.)

CROSSING BROOKLYN
Transport Group presents the première of a new musical, about two public-school teachers in love. Music by Jenny Giering; book and lyrics by Laura Harrington. Jack Cummings III directs. Previews begin Oct. 19. (Connelly, 220 E. 4th St. 212-352-3101.)

CYRANO DE BERGERAC
Kevin Kline and Jennifer Garner star in Edmond Rostand's play from 1897, with a translation by Anthony Burgess. David Leveaux directs. In previews. (Richard Rodgers, 226 W. 46th St. 212-239-6200.)

DIE MOMMIE DIE!
The playwright Charles Busch premières this new comedy noir set in the nineteen-sixties, in which he stars as a past-her-prime pop diva. In previews. Opens Oct. 21. (New World Stages, 340 W. 50th St. 212-239-6200.)

THE FARNSWORTH INVENTION
Hank Azaria and Jimmi Simpson star in a new play by Aaron Sorkin, about Philo Farnsworth, the boy genius who invented television, and David Sarnoff, the head of R.C.A., who challenged his patent ownership. Des McAnuff directs. In previews. (Music Box, 239 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200.)

A FEMININE ENDING
Sarah Treem wrote this drama, directed by Blair Brown, about a recent college graduate with an up-and-coming rock-star boyfriend and a mother on the brink of divorce. Marsha Mason stars. Opens Oct. 17. (Playwrights Horizons, 416 W. 42nd St. 212-279-4200.)

FRANKENSTEIN
A new musical inspired by Mary Shelley's novel, with music by Mark Baron, book and lyrics by Jeffrey Jackson, and adaptation by Gary P. Cohen. In previews. (37 Arts, 450 W. 37th St. 212-307-4100.)

FUERZABRUTA
The creators of "De La Guarda" return, with a new production featuring a plenitude of special effects and water. In previews. (Daryl Roth, 20 Union Sq. E. 212-239-6200.)

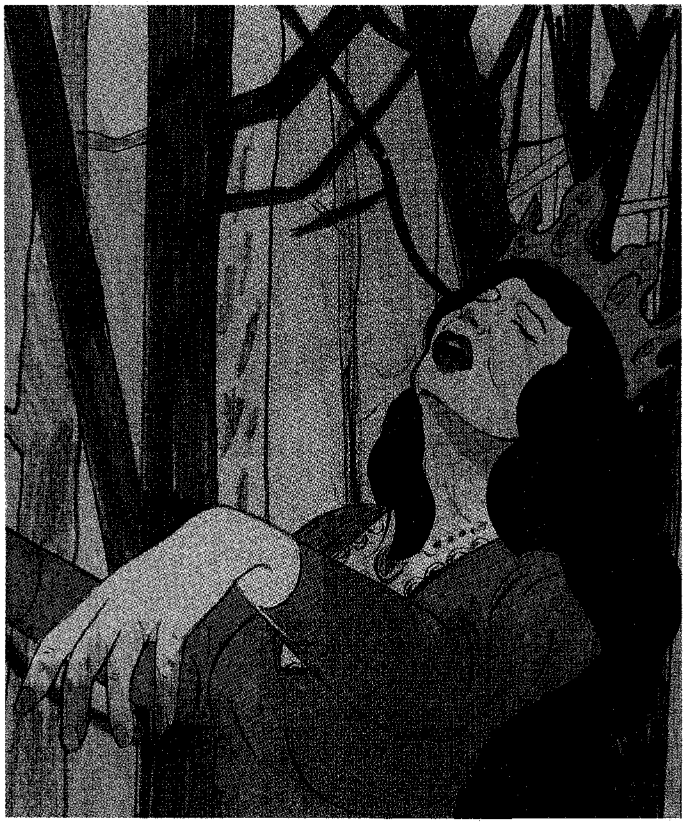
THE GLORIOUS ONES
A new musical by Lynn Ahrens and Stephen Flaherty ("Ragtime"), based on the Francine Prose novel, set in sixteenth-century Italy, about a troupe of commedia-dell'arte actors. Graciela Daniele directs. In previews. (Mitzi E. Newhouse, 150 W. 65th St. 212-239-6200.)

HAMLET
The New York première of the Wooster Group's production, directed by Elizabeth LeCompte. In previews. (Public, 425 Lafayette St. 212-967-7555.)

H. G. WELLS SCIENCE FICTION FESTIVAL
Four of Wells's classic novels are adapted and directed by Dan Bianchi: "The Time Machine," "The Invisible Man," "The War of the Worlds," and "The Island of Dr. Moreau." Opens Oct. 17. (59E59, at 59 E. 59th St. 212-279-4200.)

HOODOO LOVE
Katori Hall wrote this play, set in the Mississippi Delta and Memphis, about a young woman who wants to sing the blues. Lucie Tiberghien directs. In previews. (Cherry Lane, 38 Commerce St. 212-239-6200.)

KRUM
The Polish theatre company TR Warszawa returns to BAM with the Israeli playwright Hanoch Levin's drama, directed by Krzysztof Warlikowski. In Polish with English supertitles. Oct. 17-20. (BAM's Harvey Theatre, 651 Fulton St. 718-636-4100.)



The soprano Maria Guleghina is featured in the Metropolitan Opera's new production of "Macbeth," beginning Oct. 22.

RACHEL DOMM

MINIMUM WAGE
An a-cappella musical about the employees of a fast-food burger joint, written by Sean Altman and Charlie and Jeff LaGreca. Guy Stroman directs. In previews. Opens Oct. 20. (The Green Room, 45 Bleecker St. 212-239-6200.)

1001
The première of a drama by Jason Grote, a take on Scheherazade's tales, exploring Israel-Palestine politics and the West's influence on them. Ethan McSweeny directs the Page 73 production. Previews begin Oct. 22. (Nagelberg Theatre at Baruch Performing Arts Center, 55 Lexington Ave. 212-352-3101.)

THE OVERWHELMING
Roundabout Theatre Company presents J. T. Rogers's drama, about an American family living in Rwanda during the 1994 genocide. In previews. Opens Oct. 23. (Laura Pels, 111 W. 46th St. 212-719-1300.)

PETER AND JERRY
Edward Albee has expanded his 1959 drama "Zoo Story," adding a new first act, about the earlier life of the character Peter. Bill Pullman, Dallas Roberts, and Johanna Day star. Pam MacKinnon directs. Previews begin Oct. 19. (Second Stage, 307 W. 43rd St. 212-246-4422.)

PHILOKTETES
John Jesurun wrote and directs this contemporary adaptation of Sophocles' "Trojan War." Opens Oct. 17. (SoHo Rep, 46 Walker St. 212-868-4444.)

PYGMALION
Claire Danes and Jefferson Mays star in Shaw's classic drama, in a Roundabout Theatre Company production. David Grindley directs. In previews. Opens Oct. 18. (American Airlines Theatre, 227 W. 42nd St. 212-719-1300.)

THE RECEPTIONIST
Adam Bock wrote this dark comedy, about a highly competent receptionist (Jayne Houdyshell) whose work is interrupted by a visiting stranger. Joe Mantello directs. In previews. (New York City Center, Stage I, 131 W. 55th St. 212-581-1212.)

ROCK 'N' ROLL
Tom Stoppard's new play, directed by Trevor Nunn, follows an anti-Communist Prague rock band and the family of a British Marxist philosopher. Previews begin Oct. 19. (Bernard B. Jacobs, 242 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200.)

THE SCREWTAPE LETTERS
Max McLean stars in an adaptation of C. S. Lewis's novel, in which a demon in Hell explains the business of sin and temptation to his protégé in a series of letters. Previews begin Oct. 18. (Theatre at St. Clement's, 423 W. 46th St. 212-279-4200.)

SPAIN
Jim Knable wrote this comedy, about the fantasy life of a divorcée. Annabella Sciorra stars. In previews. (Lucille Lortel, 121 Christopher St. 212-279-4200.)

SPEECH & DEBATE
Stephen Karam's new play, about a high-school debate team in Oregon, presented by Roundabout Theatre Company. Jason Moore directs. In previews. (Roundabout Underground, 111 W. 46th St. 212-719-1300.)

THINGS WE WANT
The New Group presents a world première of a play by Jonathan Marc Sherman, directed by Ethan Hawke. Paul Dano, Peter Dinklage, Josh Hamilton, and Zoe Kazan star. Previews begin Oct. 22. (Acorn, 410 W. 42nd St. 212-279-4200.)

A VIEW FROM 151ST STREET
LAByrinth Theatre Company presents a new drama by Bob Glaudini, about the denizens of Harlem. Peter DuBois directs. In previews. (Public, 425 Lafayette St. 212-967-7555.)

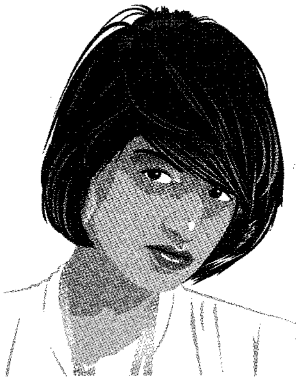
YOUNG FRANKENSTEIN
Mel Brooks adapts his 1974 film into a musical; Thomas Meehan co-wrote and Susan Stroman choreographs and directs. Roger Bart, Megan Mullally, Sutton Foster, Andrea Martin, and Christopher Fitzgerald star. In previews. (Hilton, 213 W. 42nd St. 212-307-4100.)

NOW PLAYING

THE CHILDREN OF VONDERLY
The Ma-Yi Theatre Company begins its season with Lloyd Suh's drama, about the chaos that follows the death of the father of six adopted children, now grown, most of whom have disabilities. In her grief, the mother, Norma Vonderly (Lynn Cohen), rages and curses at her children; the devoted oldest son, Jerry (William Jackson Harper), who uses a wheelchair, tries to keep everyone happy but then starts to stare out the window and drink from a flask. Though the actors bring warmth and intelligence to their roles and the dialogue has moments of humor, too much of the play consists of volatile fights between family members, and Ralph Peña's direction keeps the overwrought emotions at

CRITIC'S NOTEBOOK
DANCE EVERYWHERE

In 2005, Maya Arulpragasam, a British native of Sri Lankan origin who records as M.I.A., released her début album, "Arular." "Arular" didn't sell millions of records, but it pushed an inevitable process forward and changed the world, in its minor way. Disparate musics like hip-hop, dancehall, and bhangra have never been far apart in spirit, but "Arular" erased the remaining distinctions. If M.I.A. has one point—and she doesn't, she has several—it is that dancing is platform-blind. Her new album, "Kala," makes this point in a ferocious and idiosyncratic way. You like the Clash? Try "Paper Planes," built around a sample of "Straight to Hell." Want to do your favorite Jamaican dance step to a re-creation of various Indian drumming styles? Try "Boyz." Do your tastes run to Jonathan Richman and the Pixies? They'll pop up, too. If this seems like too much for one person in one place, go to the enormous new venue Terminal 5 (formerly the equally enormous dance club Exit) on Oct. 18 and Oct. 19, and let Maya show you the steps herself.



—Sasha Frere-Jones

a fever pitch throughout. (East 13th Street Theatre, 136 E. 13th St. 212-352-3101. Through Oct. 21.)

DIVIDING THE ESTATE
Horton Foote allows the family dispute at the center of his new play (fluently directed by Michael Wilson) to unfold calmly in a fully thought-out, emotionally consistent, and compassionate universe. In the parlous economic climate of Texas in the late nineteen-eighties, the Gordon family is land rich and cash poor. The imperious family matriarch, Stella (the pitch-perfect Elizabeth Ashley), staunchly refuses to split up the property in response to pressure from her daughter Mary Jo (the expert Hallie Foote, the playwright's daughter), who wants her inheritance now. In his portrayal of the desperation of the affluent unmoored by seismic economic and cultural shifts, the ninety-one-year-old playwright has the confidence to trust his characters and the wisdom to follow them. (Reviewed in our issue of 10/15/07.) (59E59, at 59 E. 59th St. 212-279-4200.)

FORBIDDEN BROADWAY: RUDE AWAKENING
Another theatre season gone by yields another round of ripe targets for Gerard Alessandrini's long-running Broadway spoof: Bill T. Jones's choreography for "Spring Awakening," the self-accompanying actors in "Company" (and its brooding star, Raúl Esparza, whose big number, "Being Alive," is rewritten here as "Being Intense"), the flippered leading lady of the upcoming stage version of "The Little Mermaid." The "Grey Gardens" parody falls a little flat, as do a handful of others, but they're in the minority. (47th Street Theatre, 304 W. 47th St. 212-239-6200.)

THE GOLDMAN PROJECT
Staci Swedeen wrote this drama, about a Holocaust survivor. Joe Brancato directs. (Abingdon, 312 W. 36th St. 212-868-4444.)

HAMLET
With the Wooster Group's deconstructed "Hamlet" on the horizon, the Pearl offers a straightforward, swords-and-all staging of the tragedy, under the mild-mannered direction of Shepard Sobel. (His most unorthodox move is to have the Ghost's lines come in over a speaker, which makes it seem a little like Hamlet is being summoned to the principal's office.) The actors tend to perform from the neck up, giving the well-recited language no corresponding dimension in the body and the bloodstream. Jolly Abraham is the exception, by turns fiery and frail as Ophelia. Abraham seems to be working in a different acting style from the rest of the cast—which, in this buttoned-up production, is a blessing. (80 St. Marks Pl. 212-598-9802.)

JUMP
This high-energy Korean martial-arts spectacle by the Yegam Theatre Company, making its U.S. début after a successful international tour, is a dialogue-free flurry of slapstick and acrobatics, complete with strobe lights, fog, original music, and audience participation. A typical family—wise grandfather, proud father, feisty mother, drunken uncle, demure daughter—happens to consist solely of nimble martial-arts masters who enjoy showing off their moves. Activities like cleaning the house or welcoming a suitor present new opportunities for them to break boards over each other's heads, run up the living-room walls, do flips, and wield an array of innocent-looking weapons. When a pair of inept burglars show up, things really get cooking. Two expert casts, directed by Chul-Ki Choi, perform in rotation. (Union Square Theatre, 100 E. 17th St. 212-307-4100.)

MARGARET CHO'S THE SENSUOUS WOMAN
"I always wanted to do a variety show, kind of like Donny and Marie," Margaret Cho says at the beginning of her new comedy-burlesque show, which she conceived as a raunchy celebration of the female form. True, the Osmonds never played host to the likes of Miss Dirty Martini (clothed, but not for long, in an American flag) or a stripping dwarf—but you wouldn't expect anything less from Cho, who describes herself as "a little bit country, a little bit anal." As a comedian, Cho has always cared more about vanquishing cultural demons than about just being edgy, and in her new role as impresario she does an ample amount of both. (Zipper, 336 W. 37th St. 212-352-3101.)

MAURITIUS
When Theresa Rebeck's latest play (directed by Doug Hughes) opens, Jackie (the excellent Alison Pill) is in possession of a stamp collection that her late mother gave her as a reward for her loyal care during a long struggle with cancer. All that stands between Jackie and a very big payday is the question of whether or not the stamps are real. But what eventually becomes clear is that the only fake here is the play. For all its shiny surface, "Mauritius" follows the old recipe of complication without depth. In this ersatz but entertaining sleight of hand, the audience gets robbed—of the revelations of character and of feeling that a play should provide. (10/15/07) (Biltmore, 261 W. 47th St. 212-239-6200.)

MERCY THIEVES
Two criminals take a murderous road trip across Australia in this dark comedy by Mark Kilmurry, starring Nick Stevenson, Jeremy Waters, and Victoria Roberts. (Kraine, 85 E. 4th St. 212-868-4444.)

THE MISANTHROPE
The Belgian-born director Ivo van Hove has set Molière's brilliant 1666 comedy in a world that's largely made up of sleek dark glass and bright lights. As Alceste, Molière's deeply questioning realist hero, Bill Camp reads Arabic newspapers and grumbles—at times, incoherently—at his friends or love interests as they check their cell phones and try to get reservations at a chic new restaurant. After about twenty minutes of this kind of banner waving—modern man is "wrong," empty, corrupt, morally compromised—the play starts to feel thin. Like the actors, van Hove uses Molière to his own ends: less to explore theatre's potential than to show us how very clever he is. (New York Theatre Workshop, 79 E. 4th St. 212-239-6200.)

NIGHT OVER TAOS
Estelle Parsons directs this Intar production of a drama by Maxwell Anderson, about Pablo Montoya, who in 1847 fought to protect Mexico from being ceded to the U.S. (Theatre for the New City, 155 First Ave., at 10th St. 212-352-3101. Through Oct. 20.)

NONE OF THE ABOVE
Jenny Lyn Bader wrote this play, about getting into Princeton. Julie Kramer directs. (Reviewed in this issue.) (Lion, 410 W. 42nd St. 212-279-4200.)

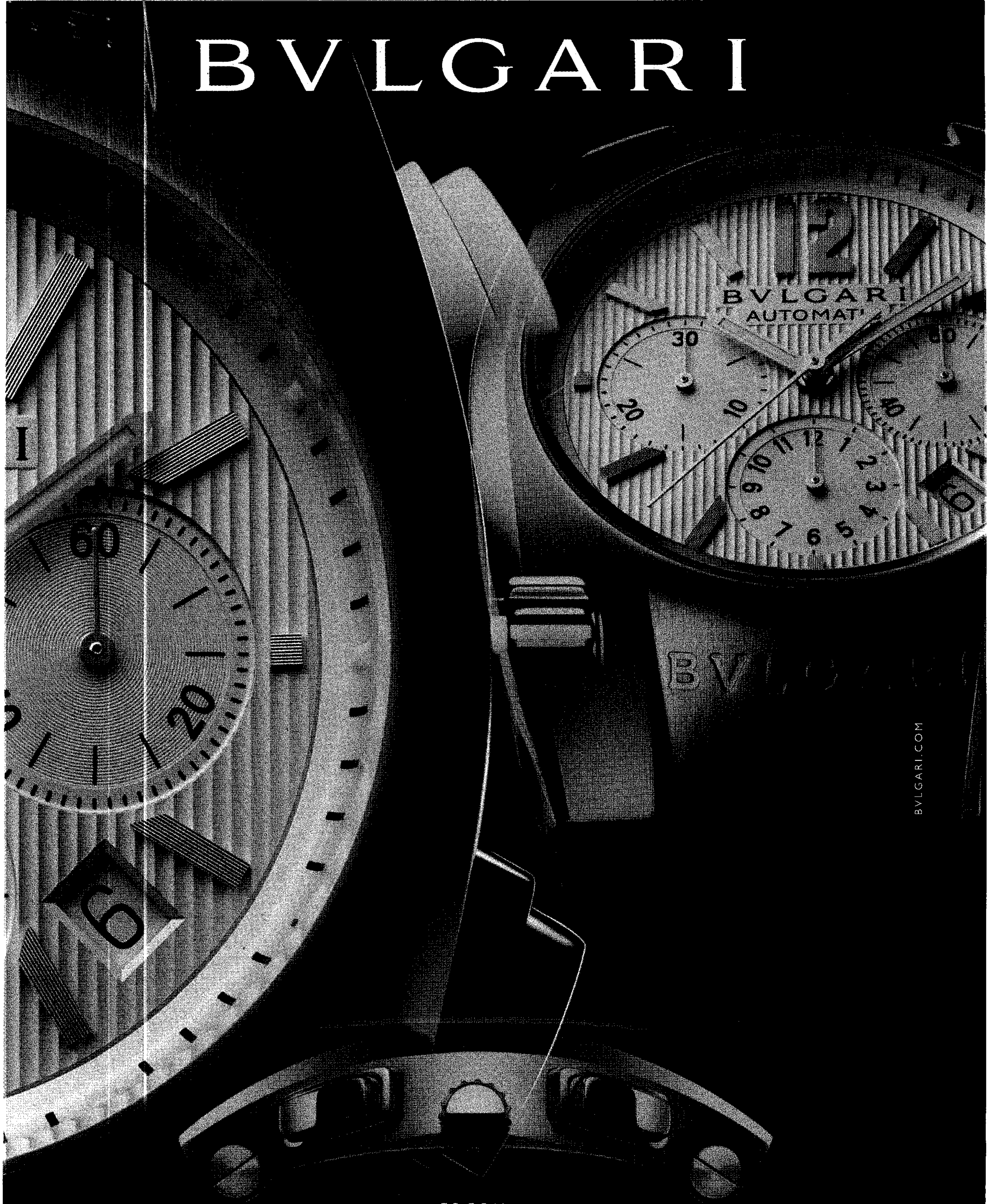
THE RISE OF DOROTHY HALE
Myra Bairstow's clumsy drama unfolds in a white-glove Manhattan apartment dominated by a massive window, through which the title character, a struggling actress with society connections, is reported to have jumped to her death, in 1938. Bairstow, emboldened by research, thinks otherwise: she tasks her borrowed-from-history characters (including Clare Booth Luce and Harry Hopkins) with fleshing out her own theory, in which political ambition and the threat of scandal presage a cold-blooded murder. Saddled with exposition, the characters lumber along, periodically interrupted by the declamations of an over-the-top Frida Kahlo, who hears Dorothy's voice—from the grave—imploring her to paint her final portrait. Pamela Hall directs. (St. Luke's Theatre, 308 W. 46th St. 212-239-6200.)

THE RITZ
Roundabout Theatre Company revives Terrence McNally's 1975 comedy, starring Rosie Perez and Kevin Chamberlin. (Reviewed in this issue.) (Studio 54, at 254 W. 54th St. 212-719-1300.)

THREE MO' TENORS
What looks like an iffy premise on paper—two rotating casts of little-known tenors performing opera lite on a bill with show tunes, soul, and pop—makes for a lively and unexpectedly moving show, thanks in large part to the tenors' evident delight in performing. Marion J. Caffey, who conceived and directed the act as a showcase for African-American talent, knows how to deliver a schmalzy good time: his set looks like an upscale telethon, and amidst a flurry of costume changes he drops sly references to everyone from Gladys Knight to Usher. But it's the show's palpable earnestness that makes a lingering impression, whether in a fierce version of the gospel song "No Ways Tired" or an unabashedly sweet rendition of a sentimental old ballad. (Little Shubert, 422 W. 42nd St. 212-239-6200.)

WHEN THE MESSENGER IS HOT
Adapted from the short story by Elizabeth Crane, Lauren Eason's small, sweet dramedy opens the in-

QUICKHONEY



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augural GoChicago! Festival at 59E59. In this play, which received its world première last summer at Steppenwolf, Josie, who is inexplicably played by three different actors, is a grieving young woman dealing with her mother's death and a coinciding series of wacky, disappointing romantic encounters. Years later, her sanity is called into question when she receives a phone call from her mother, who claims to be stranded at a bus station in North Dakota. Despite the occasionally precious staging and the text's tendency toward the overly sentimental, the ensemble of five actors, with its infectious chemistry, render the play perfectly enjoyable, if somewhat quaint. Jessica Thebus directs. (59E59, at 59 E. 59th St. 212-279-4200.)

THE WOLVES IN THE WALLS

Four appealing actor-singers, four accomplished puppeteers, and four talented musicians make up the performing company of this National Theatre of Scotland production (recommended for ages seven and up), adapted from the book by Neil Gaiman and Dave McKean. The story, in which young Lucy bravely leads her mom, dad, and older brother through a lupine domestic crisis, features a touch of honest dread and a couple of good jumpy scares, but mostly it's funny and family-affirming. Directed by Vicky Featherstone, designed by Julian Crouch, and composed by Nick Powell, the play is consistently clever and handsome, but even at seventy-five minutes feels slightly padded. (New Victory, 209 W. 42nd St. 646-223-3010. Through Oct. 21.)

Also Playing

AVENUE Q: Golden, 252 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200. **CHICAGO:** Ambassador, 219 W. 49th St. 212-239-6200. **A CHORUS LINE:** Schoenfeld, 236 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200. **THE COLOR PURPLE:** Broadway Theatre, Broadway at 53rd St. 212-239-6200. **CURTAINS:** Al Hirschfeld, 302 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200. **THE DROWSY CHAPERONE:** Marquis, Broadway at 45th St. 212-307-4100. **THE FANTASTICKS:** Snapple Theatre Center, 210 W. 50th St. 212-307-4100. **GONE MISSING:** Barrow Street Theatre, 27 Barrow St. 212-239-6200. **GREETINGS FROM YORKVILLE:** SoHo Playhouse, 15 Vandam St. 212-691-1555. **HAIRSPRAY:** Neil Simon, 250 W. 52nd St. 212-307-4100. **JERSEY BOYS:** August Wilson, 245 W. 52nd St. 212-239-6200. **LEGALLY BLONDE THE MUSICAL:** Palace, Broadway at 47th St. 212-307-4100. **THE LION KING:** Minskoff, 220 W. 45th St. 212-307-4747. **MAMMA MIA!:** Winter Garden, Broadway at 50th St. 212-239-6200. **MARY POPPINS:** New Amsterdam, 214 W. 42nd St. 212-307-4747. **MASKED:** DR2, at 103 E. 15th St. 212-239-6200. **MONTY PYTHON'S SPAMALOT:** Shubert, 225 W. 44th St. 212-239-6200. **MOSCOW CATS THEATRE:** Tribeca Performing Arts Center, 199 Chambers St. 212-307-7171. **SCARCITY:** Atlantic Theatre Company, 336 W. 20th St. 212-279-4200. Through Oct. 21. **SPRING AWAKENING:** Eugene O'Neill, 230 W. 49th St. 212-239-6200. **TINGS DEY HAPPEN:** Culture Project, 55 Mercer St. 212-352-3101. **THE 25TH ANNUAL PUTNAM COUNTY SPELLING BEE:** Circle in the Square, 50th St. between Broadway and Eighth Ave. 212-239-6200. **WICKED:** Gershwin, 222 W. 51st St. 212-307-4100. **XANADU:** Helen Hayes, 240 W. 44th St. 212-239-6200.

NIGHT LIFE
ROCK AND POP

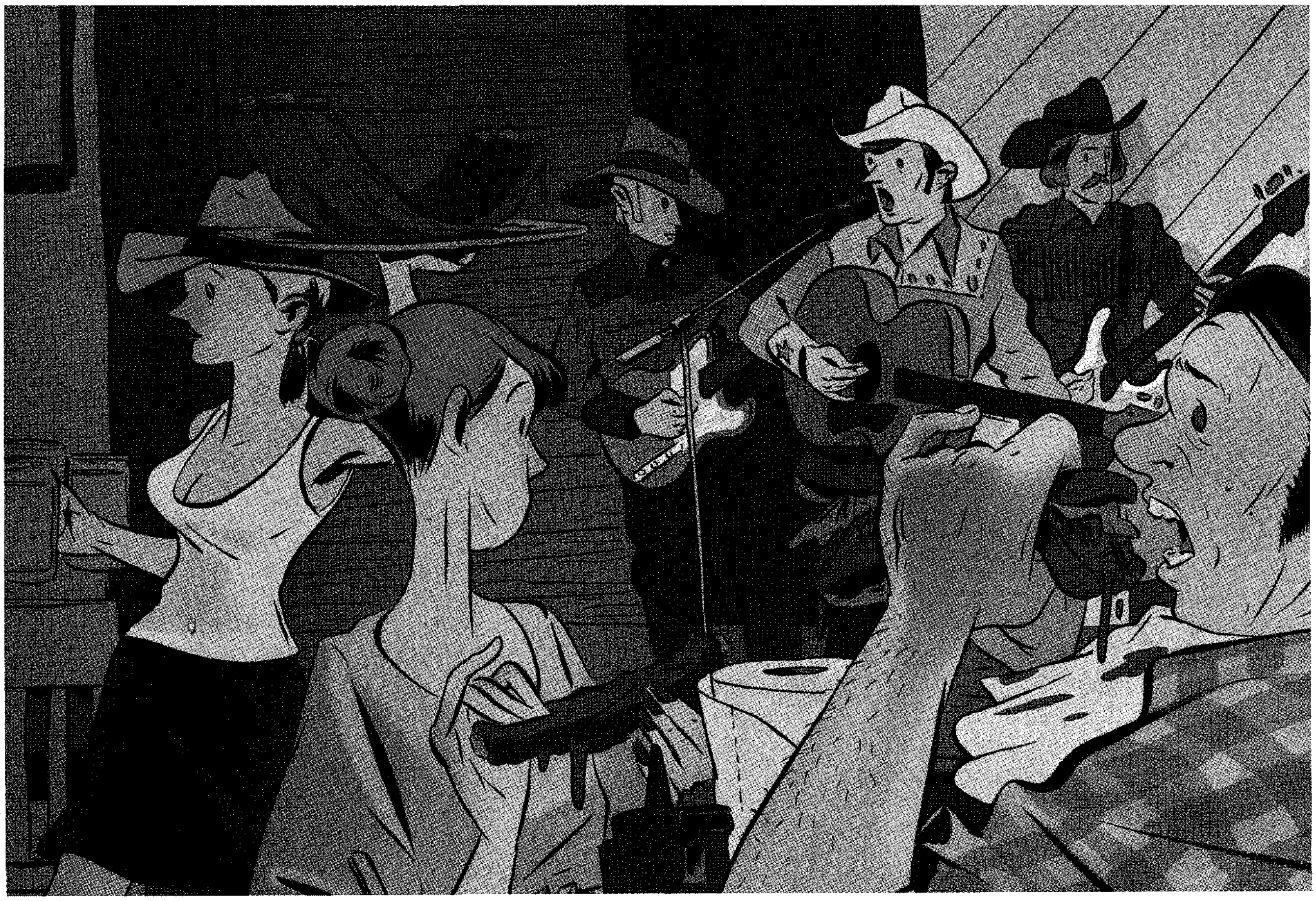
Musicians and night-club proprietors live complicated lives; it's advisable to call ahead to confirm engagements.

B. B. KING BLUES CLUB & GRILL

237 W. 42nd St. (212-997-4144)—Oct. 17: **Earl Scruggs,** the banjo virtuoso and bluegrass master. Oct. 19: The flourishing soft-rock career of **Christopher Cross** was sidelined by the dawn of MTV, in the early eighties. Though Cross slunk out of the spotlight, he continues to ride like the wind and hasn't stopped sailing. Later that night, **Del the Funky Homosapien,** a cousin of the rapper Ice Cube, traffics in quirky rhymes and innovative, danceable cadences. With the Texan rapper **Devin the Dude** and others. Oct. 20: The **Charlie Daniels Band** recently released "Live from Iraq," an album of material it delivered in support of the troops overseas. Daniels takes a more commercial tack with his new album, "Deuces" (which pairs him with Brad Paisley, Travis Tritt, Vince Gill, Dolly Parton, and other guest vocalists), but his signature blend of Southern rock flecked with elements of bluegrass and gospel remains impervious to trend. Oct. 21: New York's **Overkill** has been serving up reliably speedy heavy metal for more than two decades. Untroubled by innovation, the band stays the frantic, furious course on its new album, "Immortalis."

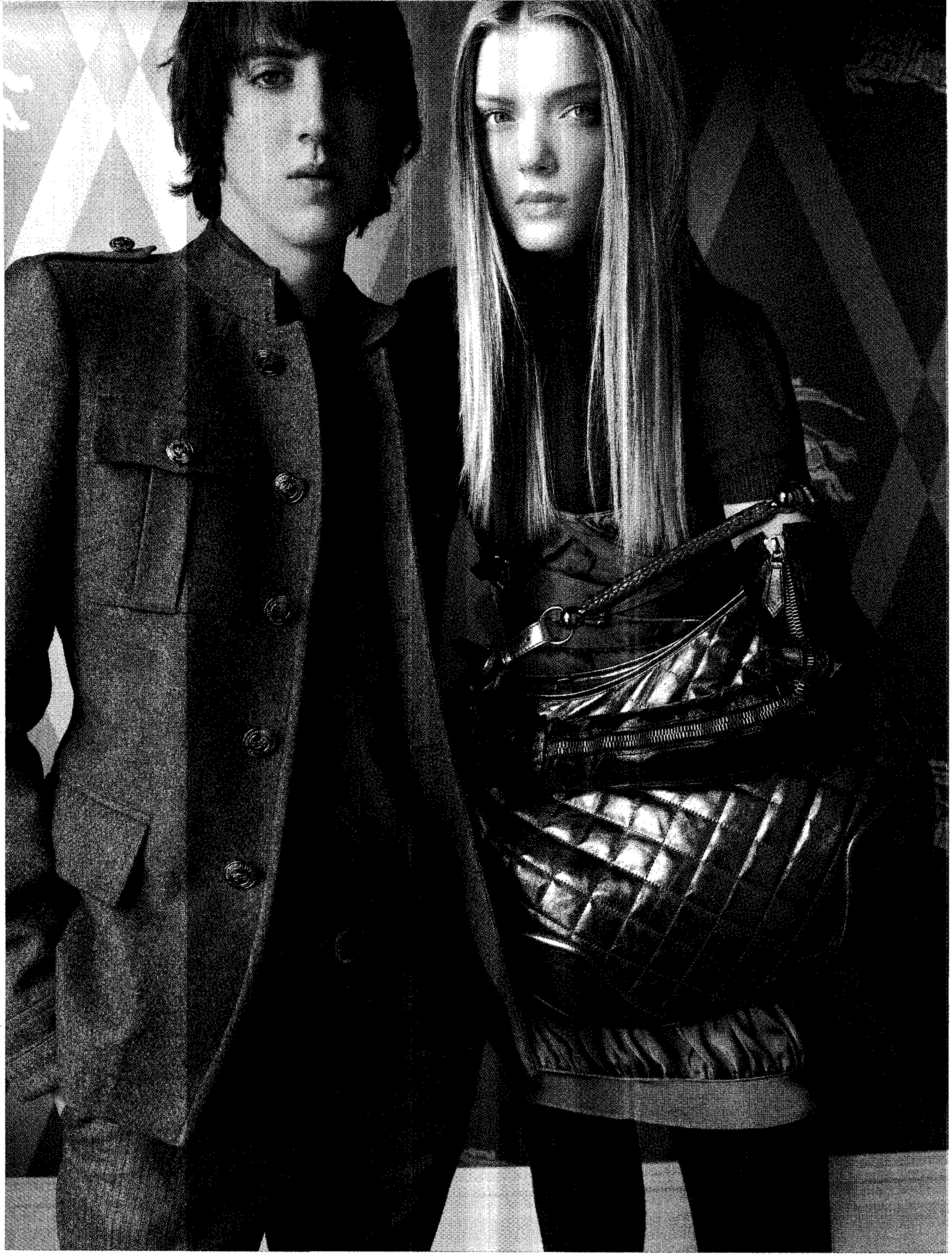
BEACON THEATRE

Broadway at 74th St. (212-307-7171)—Oct. 17 and Oct. 22: **Experience Hendrix.** When Jimi Hendrix died in 1970, at twenty-seven, he left the world many things—from a slew of innovative ways to play the electric guitar (upside down, behind the back, on fire) to a brilliant collection of classic rock songs—but he didn't leave behind a will. His estate went to his father, Al, who controlled it until his death, in 2002. After that, the eighty-million-dollar entity was subjected to a lengthy, complicated, and thorny legal action. Through all the family squabbling, Experience Hendrix, the parent holding company run by Jimi's adopted sister, Janie, managed to mount a short West Coast tribute tour to the late guitarist in 2004, with **Buddy Guy, Kenny Wayne Shepherd,** and **Hubert Sumlin** on guitar. It also featured the rhythm section that backed Hendrix at Woodstock (and plenty of other gigs), the drummer **Mitch Mitchell** and the bassist **Billy Cox.** This crew is back for an East Coast tour, joined by **Robert Ran-**



ZOHAR LAZAR

The bi-level space Hill Country, a relative newcomer to the city's barbecue scene, has live music on its menu five nights a week.



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dolph, **Robbie Krieger,** and many others. Oct. 23: Years ago, **Sinéad O'Connor** caused an international furor by tearing up a picture of the Pope on "Saturday Night Live." Some people never forget, and the provocative Irish chanteuse's career has yet to fully recover. Not that she seems concerned. Ever the free spirit, O'Connor retired for a while and then returned to recording. Recently, she delved into reggae with the release "Throw Down Your Arms." Her latest album, "Theology," is a double disk of music with a spiritual theme.

BOWERY BALLROOM
6 Delancey St. (212-533-2111)—Oct. 18: **British Sea Power,** a young group from Brighton with a taste for literate rock. Oct. 19: The **Spinto Band,** an uplifting ensemble from Delaware. With **Sons and Daughters,** which features two former associates of the melancholic Scottish outfit Arab Strap.

CAKE SHOP
152 Ludlow St. (212-253-0036)—Oct. 19: **Ha Ha Tonka.** This four-piece group from Springfield, Missouri, takes its name from a state park in the Ozarks that's home to the ruins of a nineteenth-century castle, and it plays slightly spooky rock with a rootsy edge. With **Scotland Yard Gospel Choir,** a sprawling ensemble out of Chicago, and many other acts.

CMJ MUSIC MARATHON
The annual festival of meeting, greeting, and grabbing at the next big thing brings together a thousand bands from every conceivable genre. If there's a show listed in this section during the festival's dates (Oct. 16-20), you can bet your kid's college fund that it's part of the gathering. (For more information, visit www.cmj.com.)

FILLMORE NEW YORK AT IRVING PLAZA
17 Irving Pl., at 15th St. (212-777-6800)—Oct. 17: **Serj Tankian** is the elastic-voiced front man from the politically charged alternative-metal band System of a Down. The **Nightwatchman,** meanwhile, is the folksy agitprop alter ego of the Rage Against the Machine guitarist Tom Morello. Together, these two performers promise an evening of righteous indignation delivered at high decibels.

HAMMERSTEIN BALLROOM
Manhattan Center, 311 W. 34th St. (212-307-7171)—Oct. 22-23 and Oct. 26-28: **Morrissey's** wan visage and plangent voice, coupled with his sexually ambiguous lyrics, helped make the Smiths one of the more original and beloved bands of the post-punk era. Since the band's acrimonious breakup in the late eighties, the patron saint of effete British melancholy has been dogged by pleas to reunite with his estranged comrades. Such a resumption of duty seems out of the question, and Morrissey has pursued a bumpy solo career.

HILL COUNTRY
30 W. 26th St. (212-255-4544)—This newish bi-level barbecue joint was inspired by the savory flavors of Lockhart, Texas, and the legendary sounds of Austin. Upstairs, diners line up at counters to get dry-rubbed brisket wrapped in butcher paper, along with such hard-to-find Texas specialties as sausages from Kreuz Market, a smokehouse in Lockhart, and ice cream from Blue Bell Creameries, in Brenham. Live country, blues, and jazz music is performed five nights a week downstairs, where long wooden tables and mismatched chairs sidle up to a sizable bar decorated with cowboy boots. It doesn't take too many Hill Country Coolers (the drink is a childishly sweet mixture of handmade Texan vodka, triple sec, and Tang) to make you feel like you're miles from Manhattan; one country performer there recently promised, "If you buy my CD, I'll come mow your lawn." Oct. 17: The tongue-in-cheek urban country of Brooklyn's **Millers Farm.** Oct. 18: The local bluegrass and old-time band **Blue Harvest.** Oct. 19: A taste of Kings County honky-tonk with **Sean Kershaw & the New Jack Ramblers.** Oct. 23: The country outfit **Li'L Mo and the Monicats,** which is fronted by the old-school vocalist Monica Passin.

JOE'S PUB
425 Lafayette St. (212-539-8777)—Oct. 17 and Oct. 19: **Mates of State,** a husband-and-wife group, serve up shimmering pop confections. Kori Gardner (organ and vocals) and Jason Hammel (drums and vocals) have a charming "play anywhere, anytime" approach, and their whimsical songs are suitable for long road trips, dance marathons, and any number of late-night activities. Oct. 20: **Burkina Electric,** a group from Burkina Faso mixing West African rhythms and Western club beats, features the whirlwind vocalist Maï Lingani and Lukas Ligeti, the son of the late Hungarian composer Gyorgy Ligeti.

TABLES FOR TWO
SOTO

357 Sixth Ave., near Washington Pl. (212-414-3088)—Soto, Sotohiro Kosugi's first restaurant in New York City, is a showplace for small, beautiful things. Even the glassware sets an elegant tone: a green teardrop is cut into the side of a decanter and filled with ice, creating the illusion that the sake inside is laced with crystalline stalactites. There's a slight chill in the service, too—napkins are folded more quickly than glasses are replenished—but it's more a result of restraint than unfriendliness. (It is said that Kosugi, who owned another Soto, in Atlanta, for eleven years, once blew up when a diner asked for a Diet Coke; actually, Kosugi was annoyed by the visitor's request for daikon. Regardless, there is little evidence here of managerial hot-bloodedness.) It's clear that pains are taken, even with such standards as edamame, which has an unexpected nuttiness, and a version of miso soup, the broth of which is made with lobster and *uni* for a creaminess more characteristic of a bisque. The air of careful wonder is such that, were Kosugi not a chef, you could imagine him building doll houses.

The music at Soto is barely audible, and there is little noise (unless you happen to be seated next to a table of girlfriends discussing whether it's O.K. for men to send gifts to the office. Verdict: "Work flowers are fabulous"). The menu is divided into dishes "from sushi bar" (made by Kosugi) and "from kitchen" (made by his wife), plus a page of sushi *nigiri* and rolls, and each person is advised to order a dish or three from each of them. It can get expensive quickly, though getting full is harder. The mighty geoduck, for instance—also known as the elephant-trunk clam, or, among less couth circles, worse—is whittled down to approachable form and prettily garnished with radish sprouts, which look like four-leaf clovers. Steamed lobster comes in a dainty latticework basket of lotus wrap; the flecks of the lobster's flesh recall the lip of an orchid, while a cluster of caviar, on top, brings to mind a blackberry. *Shiro ebi*—glistening, ropy white shrimp tartare—tastes faintly floral, with a lingering, perfumey sweetness, while the *kampachi* tartare with soy foam dissolves in layered tingles. Soto's tempuras are supposed to be delicious, too, but, somehow, ordering fried food seemed indelicate. (Open Mondays through Saturdays for dinner. Dishes $8-$28.)

—Lauren Collins

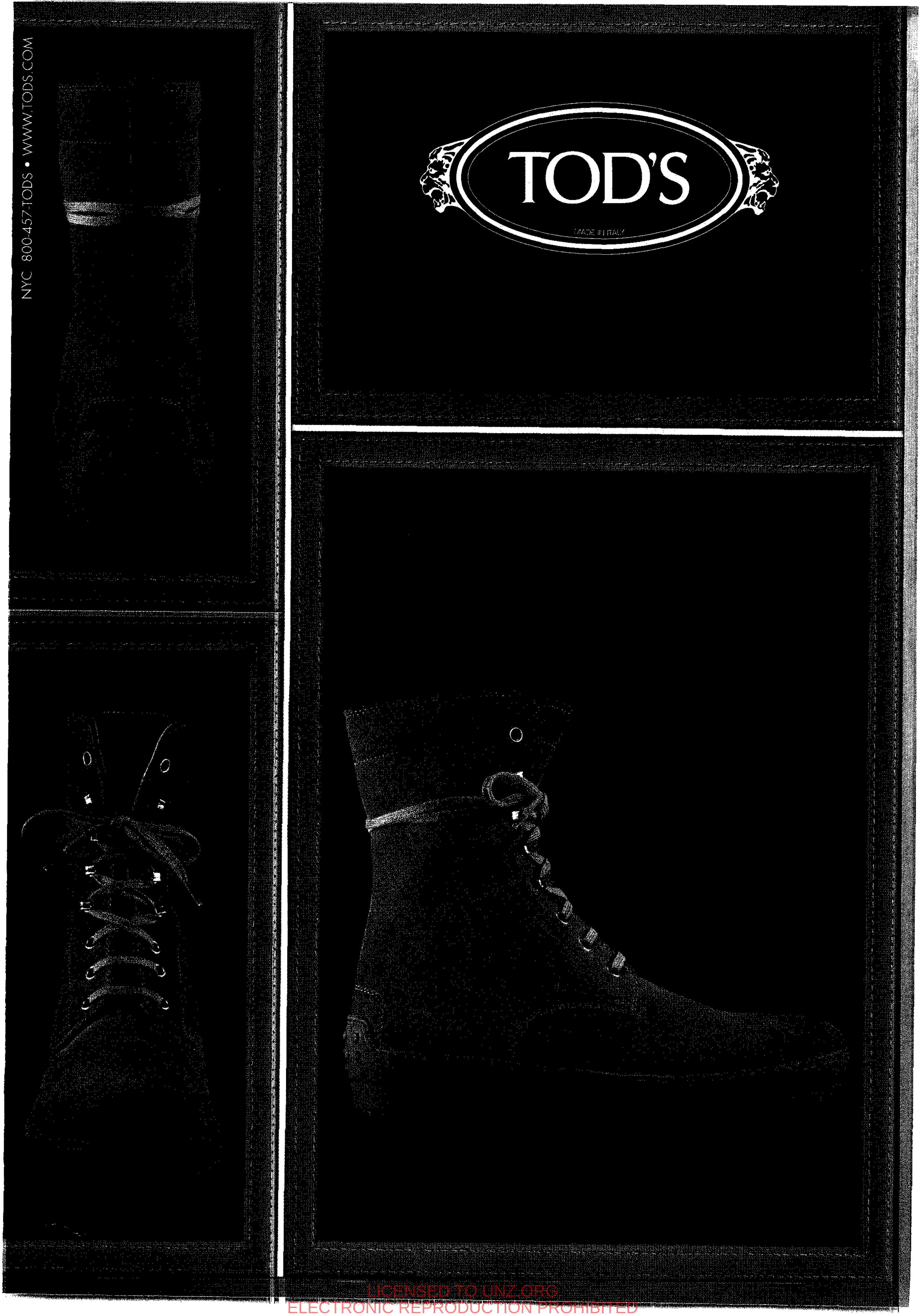
NEW YORK SOCIETY FOR ETHICAL CULTURE
2 W. 64th St. (212-277-7179)—Oct. 20: Merging the best elements of Woody Guthrie and the Clash's Joe Strummer, **Billy Bragg** has been playing urban folk music with an earnest, heartfelt edge for more than two decades. As versed in the intricacies of the heart as he is in political polemic (he's an avowed socialist), Bragg gets at meaty matters with a warm, affable style.

"OY!HOO"
This celebration of Jewish music and culture is put on by the producer Michael Dorf, the founder of the Knitting Factory. The festival features more than twenty performances throughout the city; highlights follow. Oct. 20: "Fiddlin' w/ the Roof," in which songs from the film's soundtrack will be performed by the likes of the **Klezmatics, Basya Schechter,** and **Jill Sobule.** (92nd Street Y, Lexington Ave. at 92nd St.) Oct. 21: **Bagels and Bongos,** a Jewish-Cuban midday mash-up led by the percussionist **Roberto Rodriguez.** He's invited the klezmer trumpeter **Frank London,** the salsa master **Larry Harlow,** and **Irving Fields,** the nonagenarian pianist who released the groundbreaking Jewish-Latin fusion album "Bagels and Bongos" in 1959. It prompted Fields to create further, albeit less successful, experiments with the musical cultures of Italy, France, and Hawaii—"Pizza and Bongos," "Champagne and Bongos," and "Bikinis and Bongos," respectively. (Highline Ballroom, 431 W. 16th St.) Oct. 21: **Teapacks,** a rock-fusion band from Israel, brings its funky, danceable music, with lyrics sung in English, French, Russian, Hebrew, and Arabic, to town. The group caused a stir earlier this year when its song "Push the Button" was entered in the Eurovision Song Contest, an annual competition put on by the European Broadcasting Union (which, despite its name, includes countries from outside Europe). Eurovision organizers considered banning the song, a protest against nuclear war that some think is directed at Iran, for being too political (it has a reference to "crazy leaders"). The controversy led to videos on YouTube of the group performing the song getting more than a million hits, but no Eurovision title, alas, as the members of the E.B.U. stayed true to their love of uplifting orchestral pop and gave first place to the Serbian singer Marija Šerifović for her ballad "Molitva." (For full schedule information, go to www.oyhoo.com. Through Oct. 27.)

ROSELAND
239 W. 52nd St. (212-307-7171)—Oct. 19: **Rodrigo y Gabriela,** a pair of accomplished rock guitarists from Mexico who fine-tuned a pan-global acoustic act in Ireland, have won hearts in Europe and the U.S. with up-tempo originals and reconstructions of FM-radio classics like "Stairway to Heaven." Oct. 20: The cranky guitars, poppy organs, and careful songcraft of **Spoon.**

TERMINAL 5
610 W. 56th St. (212-582-6600)—Oct. 18-19: The celebrated London-based electronica artist **M.I.A.**

WEBSTER HALL
125 E. 11th St. (212-353-1600)—Oct. 17: **Billy Bragg** (see New York Society for Ethical Culture) joins the roots-rock rebel **Steve Earle** and others for a celebration of Woody and Marjorie Guthrie to benefit the Huntington's Disease Society of America. Oct. 18: **UNKLE,** an experimental collective loosely fronted by the Mo'Wax-label honcho James LaVelle, crafts dense, cinematic music from the far edges of the stylistic spectrum. The group works with a wide array of collaborators (ranging from Massive Attack to Queens of the Stone Age). Its latest album, "War Stories," addresses today's headlines with a dizzying mix of brooding beats, metallic gui-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tars, and sombre sentiments. Oct. 19: **Ghostland Observatory,** a long-haired duo from Austin, Texas, is known for kinetic performances that get crowds up on their feet and moving. Oct. 22: **She Wants Revenge,** a Los Angeles duo that plays icy, dark tunes fit for New Wave weddings and wakes.

JAZZ AND STANDARDS

ALGONQUIN HOTEL
59 W. 44th St. (212-840-6800)—Starting Oct. 16: On her annual visit to town, the West Coast-based vocalist **Paula West** performs songs by Bob Dylan, Elvis Costello, and the Rolling Stones, along with classics from the Great American Songbook.

BIRDLAND
315 W. 44th St. (212-581-3080)—Oct. 17-20: The five singers of the **New York Voices** help keep the art of ensemble jazz singing alive. Sundays: **Chico O'Farrill's Afro-Cuban Jazz Orchestra.** The late arranger and bandleader O'Farrill was one of the grand architects of Afro-Cuban jazz. His son Arturo (see Symphony Space), who is a persuasive pianist in his own right, keeps up his dad's deft balance of steaming Latin rhythms, fervid bop improvisation, and resonant horn charts. Tuesdays in October: the composer, arranger, and big-band maven **David Berger** leads his idiomatically immaculate **Sultans of Swing** ensemble.

BLUE NOTE
131 W. 3rd St., near Sixth Ave. (212-475-8592)—Oct. 16-21: **John Scofield** and the ScoHorns. On his new album, "This Meets That," the guitarist Scofield is joined by the electric bassist Steve Swallow and the drummer Bill Stewart, along with a brace of horns, for a repertoire that includes twisted versions of "(I Can't Get No) Satisfaction" and "Behind Closed Doors." Here, the vaunted **Larry Grenadier** steps in on acoustic bass.

CARLYLE HOTEL
Madison Ave. at 76th St. (212-744-1600)—The Café Carlyle, a snug, windowless enclave that opened in the doorman district in 1955, was recently renovated. The lighting has been improved, as has the sound, and the signature wraparound Vertès murals were cleaned and discreetly expanded. Among surviving cabaret stars, only **Eartha Kitt** is capable of christening the refreshed space. She's here through Oct. 27. On Mondays the café is home to **Woody Allen and the Eddie Davis New Orleans Jazz Band.**

DIZZY'S CLUB COCA-COLA
Broadway at 60th St. (212-258-9595)—Oct. 16-21: The trumpeter **Nicholas Payton** started off a young traditionalist and has since evolved into a new-jazz eclectic ready to mix elements of swing, hard bop, and the blues with fusion and contemporary R.& B. His exceptional command of his horn keeps it all together.

FEINSTEIN'S AT LOEWS REGENCY
540 Park Ave., at 61st St. (212-339-4095)—Oct. 16-27: The witty and erudite performer **Mary Cleere Haran** trains her sights on Doris Day, the cinematic icon whose hugely popular, resolutely coy sex comedies and subsequent animal activism have obscured her once unimpeachable reputation as a singer.

IRIDIUM
1650 Broadway, at 51st St. (212-582-2121)—Oct. 17: The fluid mainstream guitarist **Jimmy Bruno.** Oct. 18-21: The clarinet may have seen better days in jazz, but it's not for any lack of trying on the part of **Eddie Daniels,** the virtuosic reedman who celebrates his new live album "Homecoming," recorded here during a previous engagement. Mondays belong to the electric-guitar innovator **Les Paul.** The **Mingus Big Band** takes over on Tuesdays.

JAZZ AT LINCOLN CENTER
Broadway at 60th St. (212-721-6500)—Oct. 18-19: The name Benny Carter may not ring many bells among the general public, but to jazz musicians and aficionados the alto saxophonist, who died in 2003, remains the King. A brilliant instrumentalist, composer, and arranger, Carter represented consummate musicianship throughout his lengthy career. His innovative and stirring big-band scores will be relished by the **Jazz at Lincoln Center Orchestra,** led by **Wynton Marsalis.**

Carol Bove's sculptures are currently at Maccarone.

ETHAN LEVITAS

JAZZ STANDARD
116 E. 27th St. (212-576-2232)—Oct. 23: A night of jazz repertory kicks off with the saxophonist **Greg Osby** and the pianist **Harold O'Neal** probing the flinty compositions of Andrew Hill. The duo will be followed by a quartet led by the trumpeter and jazz scholar **Don Sickler,** who will take on the compositions of three hard-bop giants—Hank Mobley, J. J. Johnson, and Kenny Dorham.

METROPOLITAN ROOM
34 W. 22nd St. (212-206-0440)—Oct. 18-20: The vocalist **Anna Bergman.** Tuesdays: **Annie Ross,** the female part of the celebrated vocal troupe Lambert, Hendricks, and Ross and the sharp mind behind the lyrics of the bopster anthem "Twisted."

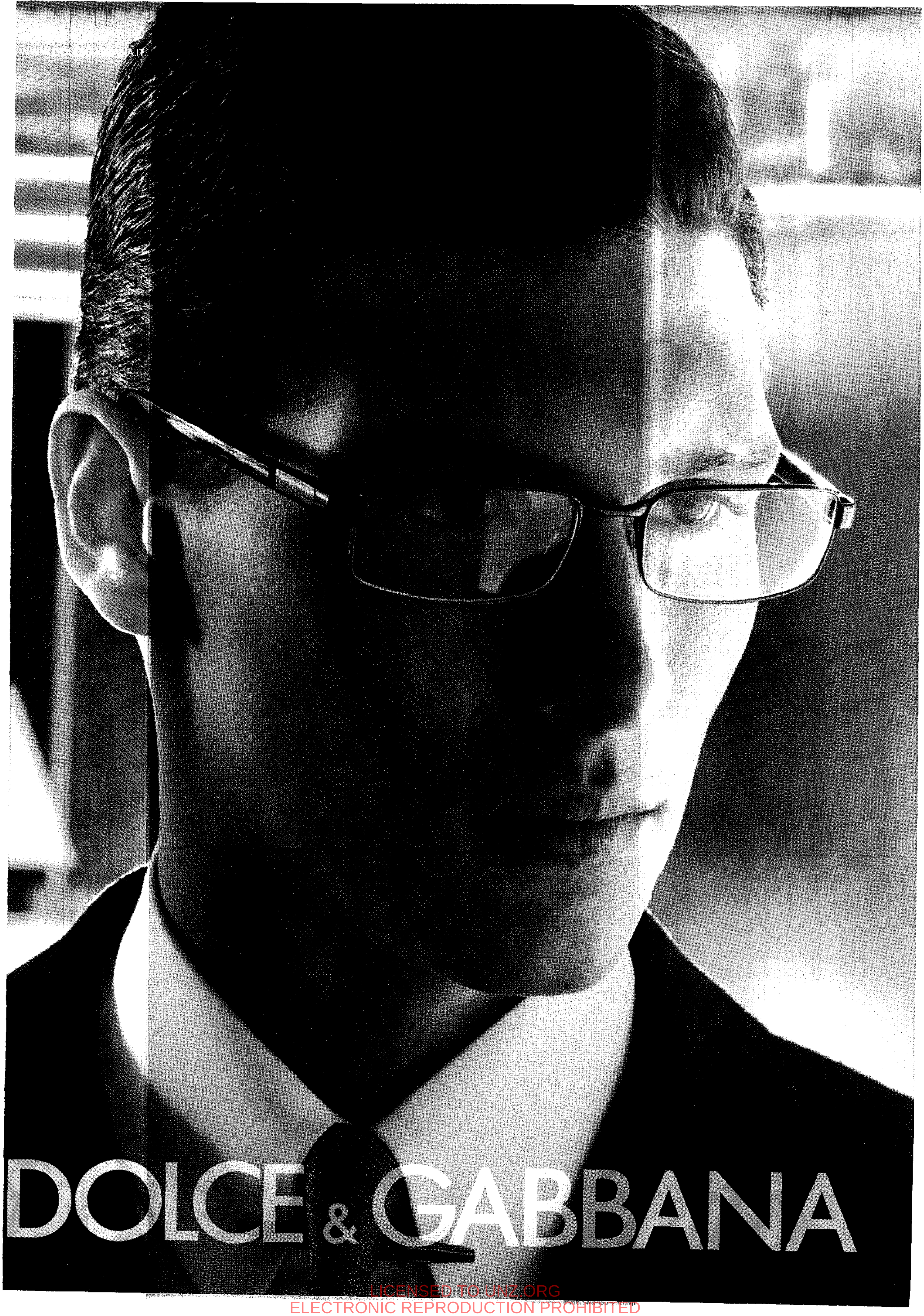
SYMPHONY SPACE
Broadway at 95th St. (212-864-5400)—Oct. 16-18: **Arturo O'Farrill,** who parted ways with Lincoln Center earlier this year, has found a home here. His crack ensemble, now dubbed the **Afro-Latin Jazz Orchestra,** revives the classic mambo sound of Machito and Tito Puente, and it stirs in new music from the percussionist **Dafnis Prieto** and the trumpeter **Tom Harrell.** This three-night run is part of a new yearlong residency at this Upper West Side institution.

THE STONE
Avenue C at 2nd St. (no phone)—The Sex Mob and Millennial Territory Orchestra bandleader and trumpet player **Steven Bernstein** has booked the latter half of the month here. For more than twenty years, Bernstein has been a mainstay of New York's downtown scene. Two of the dynamic player's regular haunts, C.B.G.B.'s and Tonic, have gone out of business, and he's been playing Saturday nights at Levon Helm's Midnight Rambles, up in Woodstock. The lineup he's selected gives players from his main outfits opportunities to present their own projects. Oct. 17: The M.T.O. guitarist, vocalist, and man about town **Matt Munisteri** takes his chamber-jazz group, Brock Mumford, for a swing back through the decades, performing his own time-warped tunes alongside vintage work by Willard Robison, Hoagy Carmichael, and even, in the case of the band's nifty take on "Don't Think Twice, It's Alright," Bob Dylan. Oct. 19: The tenor saxophonist **Michael Blake's** Hellbent is a recent power-jazz project with **Marcus Rojas** on tuba, Bernstein on trumpet and slide trumpet, and **Calvin Weston** on drums. Later that night, **Sex Mob** makes what is only its second New York appearance since its 2006 album, "Sexotica," garnered a Grammy nomination. Oct. 20: The M.T.O. violinist and vocalist **Charlie Burnham,** a collaborator of James Blood Ulmer and Cassandra Wilson, sings originals in a soulful voice with the band **Hidden City,** a quartet with mandolin, bass, cello, and drums. (For more information, see www.thestonenyc.com.)

VILLAGE VANGUARD
178 Seventh Ave. S., at 11th St. (212-255-4037)—Oct. 16-21: The **Heath Brothers.** The death, two years ago, of the bassist Percy Heath hasn't stopped the saxophonist **Jimmy Heath** and the drummer **Albert (Tootie) Heath** from continuing with their band. The pianist **Jeb Patton** and the bassist **David Wong** round out the group here. The **Vanguard Jazz Orchestra** holds sway on Mondays.

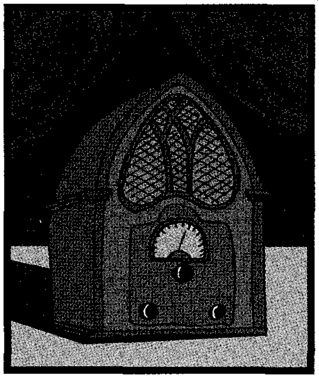
ART
MUSEUMS AND LIBRARIES

METROPOLITAN MUSEUM
Fifth Ave. at 82nd St. (212-535-7710)—**"Tapestry in the Baroque: Threads of Splendor."** Opens Oct. 17. ♦ **"The Age of Rembrandt"** arrays all two hundred and twenty-eight of the Met's circa-seventeenth-century Dutch paintings according to the dates of their acquisition, since 1871. The dubious idea pays off in surprises, as odd juxtapositions of stupendous Rembrandts and Vermeers with radiant lesser masters (and intriguing faux-Rembrandts) jolt the pictures to fresh attention. Not that artists of Holland's Golden Age would be offended by a curatorial criterion based on velleities of money. They participated in the invention of the market economy, come wealth (such as Rembrandt's) or bankruptcy (Rembrandt's, too). Their genres were product lines. Genius paid extra. Through Jan. 6, 2008. ♦ **"Abstract Expressionism and Other Modern Works: The Muriel Kallis Steinberg Newman Collection."** In two concentrated periods, between 1952 and 1954, and then again in the early sixties, the Chicago art collector amassed a stellar collection of modern art, which she recently donated to the Met. The earliest piece here is a 1919 Kurt Schwitters collage; the most recent is a Kenneth Noland target painting from 1961. In between are iconic examples from the titans of modernism—Gorky, de Kooning, Pollock, Kline—as well as equally great works by less-famous artists, including a fiery blue-and-orange canvas by Jack Tworkov


DOLCE & GABBANA

CRITIC'S NOTEBOOK
SPEAKER SET

First, there was the voice. Ever since Aeschylus thought it might be fun to give performers scripted lines, audiences have been trained to hear a given character's complex thoughts in an actor's intonation. If the play's the thing, then that voice is the meta-thing—the element that makes theatre live. To that end, the two-year-old Coyote REP, which is headed by Jeanne LaSala, produces plays for the radio. Just now, on iTunes, listeners can download the Coyote-produced "Patriot Act (An Occurrence at Yankee Stadium)," by Robert Emmet Lunney. And in November, at P.S. 122, Hotel Savant will stage a part of "The Archery Contest, a Radio Play." In our post-narrative age, when stories are told backward, sideways, and sometimes not at all, the actor's ability to convey the emotional landscape in a character's soul is refreshing. In a sense, these companies are re-creating the era of the Mercury Players, when a young director named Orson Welles made a hit of himself and great American actors like Agnes Moorehead by building new walls of sound on the radio.



MAXIMILIAN BODE

—*Hilton Als*

and a painting collaged with gray and beige patches by Conrad Marca-Relli, which marries architectonics and arabesques. Through Feb. 3, 2008. ♦ **"Impressed by Light: British Photographs from Paper Negatives, 1840-1860."** More than a hundred rare examples of the calotype—photography's first practical positive-negative process—have been assembled for a show that is predictably scholarly but unexpectedly ravishing. As with so much work from the medium's early years, the most ordinary pictures here feel driven by the photographer's desire to record the world in all its variety: a sleeping dog, a shattered tree, an embroidered saddle, a ruined abbey, the Crystal Palace, the Taj Mahal. Although the images are primarily straightforward documents, these warm-toned prints are often extraordinary—soft, slightly smudged, burnished by time, with an astonishing presence. Through Dec. 31. ♦ **"Gifts for the Gods: Images from Egyptian Temples."** Through Feb. 18, 2008. (Open Tuesdays through Sundays, 9:30 to 5:30, and Friday and Saturday evenings until 9.)

MUSEUM OF MODERN ART
11 W. 53rd St. (212-708-9400)—**"Lines, Grids, Stains, Words."** Through Oct. 22. ♦ **"Present Tense: Photographs by JoAnn Verburg."** Through Nov. 5. ♦ **"Lost Vanguard: Soviet Modernist Architecture, 1922-1932."** Through Oct. 29. ♦ **"New Photography 2007: Tanyth Berkeley, Scott McFarland, Berni Searle."** Through Jan. 1, 2008. (Open Wednesdays through Mondays, 10:30 to 5:30, and Friday evenings until 8.)

GUGGENHEIM MUSEUM
Fifth Ave. at 89th St. (212-423-3500)—**"Richard Prince: Spiritual America"** is a big and enjoyable, though brittle, retrospective of the remorselessly hip artist, who, since the late seventies, has wrung premium ironies from lumpen American culture by rephotographing advertising and magazine photographs, painting pulp-novel covers, stencilling lowdown jokes, sculpting parts of muscle cars, and, meanwhile, pastiching high styles of Abstract Expressionism, Pop, and minimalism. How clever is too clever? The sky may be the limit, judging from Prince's soaring artworldly success. This show being a don't-miss, you will decide. Through Jan. 8, 2008. (Open Saturdays through Wednesdays, 10 to 5:45, and Fridays, 10 to 8.)

WHITNEY MUSEUM OF AMERICAN ART
Madison Ave. at 75th St. (800-944-8639)—**"Kara Walker: My Complement, My Enemy, My Oppressor, My Love."** Through Feb. 3, 2008. ♦ **"Neither New Nor Correct: New Work by Mark Bradford."** Through Nov. 25. ♦ **"Danny Lyon: Montage, Film, and Still Photography."** Through Dec. 2. (Open Wednesdays, Thursdays, and weekends, 11 to 6, and Fridays, 1 to 9.)

WHITNEY MUSEUM AT ALTRIA
120 Park Ave., at 42nd St. (917-663-2453)—**"Undone."** The museum's small gallery is locked. Weeds—cast-metal facsimiles by Tony Matelli—spied through the glass doors sprout from cracks in the floor. In the public atrium, Heather Rove's screen made of two-by-fours and embedded with mirrors and Tom Holmes's chain-link fence, embellished with blown-up images of cans and bottles, lend the space the air of a construction zone. Perched high in an easy-to-miss second-floor window is a hard-to-decipher photograph by Eileen Quinlan, printed on perforated vinyl (it's a picture of mirrors). The artists and the exhibition's curators seem to propose a dismantling of the conventions of sculpture, photography, and architecture, but the concept feels half-baked. "Underdone" might have been a better title. Through Dec. 31. (Open Mondays through Fridays, 11 to 6, and Thursday evenings until 7:30.)

AMERICAN MUSEUM OF NATURAL HISTORY
Central Park W. at 79th St. (212-769-5100)—**"Mythic Creatures: Dragons, Unicorns, and Mermaids."** Through Jan. 6, 2008. ♦ The Butterfly Conservatory is open for its tenth season, with a display of tropical species. Through May 26, 2008. (Open daily, 10 to 5:45.)

AMERICAN FOLK ART MUSEUM
45 W. 53rd St. (212-265-1040)—Merry-go-round steeds and the lions that guard a synagogue's ark of the Torah might seem unrelated, but for a golden period in the early twentieth century, a handful of artisans—Jewish immigrants in New York—specialized in carving both. **"Gilded Lions and Jeweled Horses: The Synagogue to the Carousel"** examines this twofold tradition through the handiwork of several shops in Coney Island where master craftsmen, including Solomon Stein and Harry Goldstein, who made the carousel in Central Park, worked. In addition to ferocious, red-eyed lions (some eyes brightened by electric bulbs) and flowing-maned horses with lavish bridles, the show includes a collection of *mizrah*, cut-paper devotional images for the home, elaborately filigreed and intensely personal. Through March 23, 2008. (Open Tuesdays through Sundays, 10:30 to 5:30, and until 7:30 on Fridays.)

BROOKLYN MUSEUM
200 Eastern Parkway (718-638-5000)—**"Infinite Island: Contemporary Caribbean Art."** Through Jan. 27, 2008. ♦ **"Brushed with Light: American Landscape Watercolors from the Collection."** Through Jan. 27, 2008. ♦ **"Global Feminisms Remix."** Through Feb. 3, 2008. (Open Wednesdays through Fridays, 10 to 5, and Saturdays and Sundays, 11 to 6.)

COOPER-HEWITT NATIONAL DESIGN MUSEUM
Fifth Ave. at 91st St. (212-849-8300)—The Venetian-born Giovanni Battista Piranesi (1720-78) was, of course, a peerless engraver, but **"Piranesi as Designer"** focusses on the architect's far-reaching imagination. Discipline and whimsy merge in studies of ruins, in *carceri d'invenzione* (extravagant visions for impossible prisons that sparked the imaginations of Coleridge, Kafka, and Borges), and in rococo-tinged furniture, several examples of which are on view. Despite his prodigious output in other mediums, only one of Piranesi's architectural projects—a restoration of a church in Rome—was ever completed. His influence is nonetheless lasting, and is discussed here in a series of videotaped interviews with contemporary designers—among them Daniel Libeskind, who observes that Piranesi "invented a world where architecture was almost redundant." Through Jan. 20, 2008. ♦ **"Provoking Magic: Lighting of Ingo Maurer."** Through Jan. 27, 2008. (Open Mondays through Thursdays, 10 to 5, Fridays, 10 to 9, Saturdays, 10 to 6, and Sundays, noon to 6.)

INTERNATIONAL CENTER OF PHOTOGRAPHY
1133 Sixth Ave., at 43rd St. (212-857-0000)—Robert Capa was in his twenties when he photographed his iconic picture "Falling Soldier," capturing the moment when a Spanish Civil War partisan takes a bullet. **"This Is War! Robert Capa at Work"** examines his method through such epic subjects as the D-Day landing at Omaha Beach and street fighting during the Sino-Japanese War of 1937. In an especially harrowing series, an American sniper in Leipzig, in 1945, is seen setting his position and joking with his buddies, then getting hit, dying, and being replaced by another man in just a few frames. Through Jan. 6, 2008. ♦ **"Gerda Taro"** examines the short and brilliant career of Taro, Capa's partner and the first female photojournalist mortally wounded on the front—she died in Spain in 1937, a day after a Republican tank hit her car in the Battle of Brunete. Through Jan. 6, 2008. ♦ **"Other Weapons: Photography and Print Culture During the Spanish Civil War."** Through Jan. 6, 2008. (Open Tuesdays through Sundays, 10 to 6, and Friday evenings until 8.)

MORGAN LIBRARY AND MUSEUM
225 Madison Ave., at 36th St. (212-685-0008)—Émile Bernard (1868-1941) had only modest abilities as a painter, but his talent for friendship was great. **"Painted with Words: Vincent van Gogh's Letters to Émile Bernard"** presents twenty letters that van Gogh wrote between

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1887 and 1889 (Bernard's letters are lost). The Frenchman brought out his friend's ardent streak: trees in the Arles countryside inspire reveries about color, light, and form; of the sun in southern France, he writes, "I revel in it like a cicada." Sketches grace the letters, along with descriptions of technique; a selection of works by both artists provide reference points. Among the many revelations here is a disarmingly simple plan: "A starry sky for example, well—it's a thing that I should like to try to do." Through Jan. 6. (Open Tuesdays through Thursdays, 10:30 to 5, Fridays, 10:30 to 9, Saturdays, 10 to 6, and Sundays, 11 to 6.)

GALLERIES—UPTOWN

Galleries are usually open Tuesdays through Saturdays, from around 10 or 11 to between 5 and 6; please call the gallery for exact hours.

HUMA BHABHA
Totemic figures, charred stacks of air-dried clay, Styrofoam, and wire mesh. Bhabha's sculptures have been compared to Anselm Keifer's paintings, but their aesthetic roots reach back to the nineteen-forties: Adolph Gottlieb's pictograms, Alberto Giacometti's walking skeletons, Pollock before he went drippy. There is an air of neo-existentialism here that makes Bhabha's approach feel a bit too retrospective. But when it comes to recycling styles, minimalism's been exhausted, so why not a return to the sombre-colored, wreckage-obsessed nihilism and angst of Abstract Expressionism? Through Oct. 26. (Salon 94, at 12 E. 94th St. 646-672-9212.)

STEVEN PARRINO
Canvases, twisted or rumpled like soiled bedsheets, slouch halfway between wall and floor. Collages are filled with dirty sex, guns, and motorcycles. Parrino, who died in a motorcycle crash in 2005, at the age of forty-six, has spawned a legion of angry-young-man aesthetic imitators (Banks Violette being the prime suspect), and this survey of his paintings and collages is an obvious bid to spread the love to the uptown collecting set. If the move feels a little cold-blooded (the work itself is anything but), Parrino himself would hardly be surprised. "Art of this kind," he once noted, "is more cult than culture." Through Nov. 3. (Gagosian, 980 Madison Ave. 212-744-2313.)

LAURIE SIMMONS
Simmons's early photographs of molded plastic doll figures have never looked better. Cunningly awkward and charmingly low-tech, they recapture the rapt quality of children's make-believe games with an unlikely combination of sincerity and sophistication. For her "Color Coordinated Interiors" series, from 1983, Simmons shot one or more stylized, attenuated female dolls in front of grainy rear projections of tasteful decorator-style rooms. Large-scale prints emphasize the work's intentionally cheesy diorama effect, but the women never seem to be occupying these homes, only visiting them. This isn't domesticity, it's tourism. Through Oct. 27. (Skarstedt, 20 E. 79th St. 212-737-2060.)

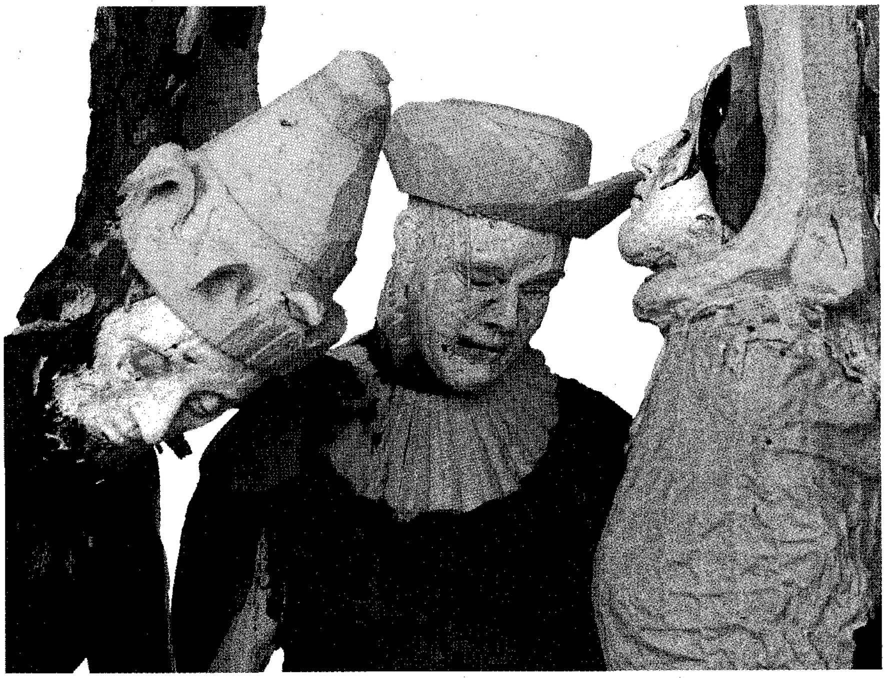
"25 YEARS: A CELEBRATION"
The gallery commemorates its quarter-century anniversary with an engrossing show of twenty-five photographs from Howard Greenberg's own collection, each accompanied by his engaging, anecdotal reminiscence. Because the selection is so personal, the exhibition is also the self-portrait of a dedicated aesthete, but the historical and stylistic range of his choices has a broad appeal. Included are exceptional prints of well-known images by Lewis Hine, Roy DeCarava, Consuelo Kanaga, and Walker Evans, as well as less familiar (but no less important) work by Weegee, Karl Struss, Saul Leiter, Julia Margaret Cameron, and Dave Heath. Their common qualities: humanity, strength, and unself-conscious beauty. Through Oct. 20. (Greenberg, 41 E. 57th St. 212-334-0010.)

Short List

WILLEM DE KOONING: L. & M. Arts, 45 E. 78th St. 212-861-0020. Through Nov. 14. **NICOLÁS GUAGNINI:** Roth, 160 A E. 70th St. 212-717-9067. Through Dec. 8. **WILLIAM HENRY FOX TALBOT:** Kraus, 962 Park Ave., at 82nd St. 212-794-2064. Through Nov. 9. **H. C. WESTERMANN:** Zwirner & Wirth, 32 E. 69th St. 212-517-8677. Through Nov. 3.

GALLERIES—CHELSEA

ROBERT ADAMS
Although his individual photographs can be extraordinary, Adams's images always seem more powerful when they're shown alongside others in a series. In this case, an entire body of work is small enough to fit into one little gallery, where a row of thirty-three modestly scaled black-and-white pictures of trees wraps around three walls. The sequence has a cinematic quality, beginning with shots of leafy alder branches against the blank white sky and gradually zooming in on a single, eroded leaf. With echoes that range from Fox Talbot to James Welling, the series shifts Adams's exploration of a natural world into an intimate, abstract mode. Through Oct. 27. (Marks, 526 W. 22nd St. 212-243-1650.)



A detail of Folkert De Jong's sculpture "The Tower Violin Player," at Cohan.

AATJAN RENDERS

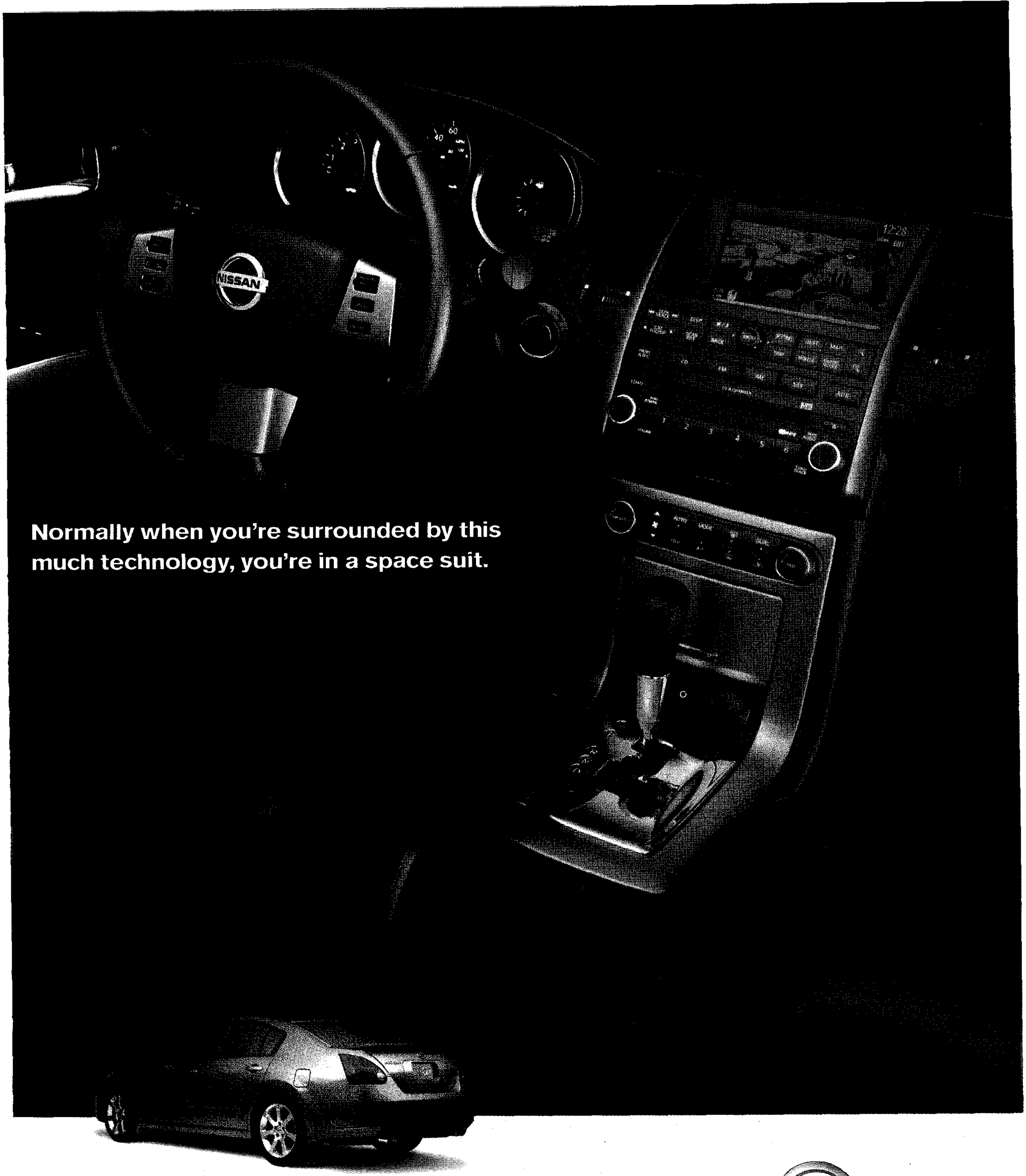
WILLEM DE KOONING
Two top galleries—L. & M. Arts uptown and Gagosian in Chelsea—combine to canonize the late, late styles of America's best painter, from the last of his furiously lyrical "pastoral" abstractions of the seventies to the wispy ribbons of primary color on white grounds, and the slow convulsions of vaguely figurative form that marked his descent into senility, which by 1987 (a decade before his death) had engulfed him. There is a joyous spell, in the early eighties, of pictures featuring scraped blurs of burning reds and yellows. Something snaps in 1985, and mere reminiscence of de Kooningness ensues. But that ain't hay. Through Oct. 27. (522 W. 21st St. 212-741-1717.)

SHIGEKO KUBOTA
The fact that this show is billed as a showcase of work by a pioneering feminist artist is strange, since most of the work memorializes Nam June Paik, the artist who died last year and was Kubota's husband. Figures welded from rough metal pipe and wire, and prismatic mounds of mirrors implanted with flickering monitors, echo Paik's practice of merging video and sculpture. The earliest pieces here date from the nineteen-nineties, and with Paik's face popping up on monitors around the gallery the show does more to underscore his role as a new-media pioneer than to argue independently for Kubota. Through Oct. 20. (Stendhal, 545 W. 20th St. 212-366-1549.)

ALEKSANDRA MIR
For this low-tech, amusing, and tacitly critical study of what is commonly known as "the news," Mir collected fifteen years' worth of front pages from the New York *Daily News* and the New York *Post*. Setting up a real-time newsroom-cum-atelier in the gallery, she and a team of assistants are sorting some ten thousand cover stories into categories and, armed with Sharpies, transforming them into posters. On a recent visit, the theme was weather, and the walls were papered with headlines alternately bemoaning heat waves ("Phew!") and blizzards ("Socked!"). On deck in the workshop was a series whose every headline read "Cop Shot!" Through Oct. 27. (Boone, 541 W. 24th St. 212-752-2929.)

PAUL NOBLE
The British artist is known for meticulous, clever drawings of fantastical cityscapes. Droll details—an overturned skateboard on the pinnacle of a Corbusian castle, a cow with a yin-yang symbol in lieu of a head—float amid pencil marks ordered by a quirky yet masterly sense of composition. One can't help liking them. So it is disappointing to see this large, uneven, and rather mercenary show. The wool rugs designed by the artist are handsome. But elements of kitsch—giant beaded curtains, polychrome ceramic sculptures, a peephole moment of porn—feel extraneous. Through Oct. 27. (Gagosian, 555 W. 24th St. 212-741-1111.)

CHRIS OFILI
The artist best known for infuriating Giuliani with his dung-decorated canvas depicting the Virgin Mary (misdirected wrath born out of cultural misunderstanding) now lives in Trinidad, and the tropical influence shows. In sultry paintings of Biblical subjects (titles invoke Lazarus and Iscariot), body parts morph into foliage á la Aubrey Beardsley. Two bronze sculptures, each titled "Annunciation," suggest the erotic coupling of human and angel, forecasting a conception that's less than immaculate. The whole thing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looks like high kitsch. Giuliani was wrong: it's not the moralists who should be offended but the art lovers. Through Nov. 3. (Zwirner, 525 and 533 W. 19th St. 212-727-2070.)

TOBIAS PUTRIH
Sensitive to the stylish properties of simple materials, Putrih treats the vocabulary of modernist design as DNA to be mutated. At its best, the approach translates into elegant, almost functional-looking sculptures, as in an off-kilter stack of hoops cut from corrugated cardboard. But when he tackles actual architecture, Putrih dilutes his quirky formalist focus. Two friends of the artist bought land in New Hampshire, and the show incorporates a proposal of sorts for their new house. There are models made from paper, sticks, wine corks, and mango pits; Lego sculptures; blurry photographs of the couple; and wobbly charcoal drawings that chart their gaze across the site. The cumulative effect is supercilious and fey. Through Nov. 3. (Protetch, 511 W. 22nd St. 212-633-6999.)

KEITH TYSON
In the installation "Large Field Array," two hundred and twenty objects—each roughly the shape of a two-foot cube—are laid out in a grid that fills the floor and studs the walls. Distinctions between nature and culture blur. A Plexiglas vat of bubbling mud rhymes visually with a movie marquee advertising "Top Gun" and "Blue Velvet." The moon is square. So is the earth, and both are the size of an amplifier. Bosch's "Garden of Earthly Delights" and Caravaggio's "Medusa" put in appearances, as do the U.S. Presidential seal, a cardboard box of giant kitchen utensils, and a stock-market L.E.D. crawl. It's part pop gazetteer, part sculptural tag sale. Through Oct. 20. (PaceWildenstein, 545 W. 22nd St. 212-989-4258.)

JACK WHITTEN
This capsule survey of works made between 1974 and 2007 spotlights an artist who has helped to radicalize abstract painting without ever lifting a brush. A quartet of recent, mosaic-like canvases look like experiments with bathroom tile, but they're actually composed of little squares of cast acrylic paint (sparkles are the result of pulverized compact disks). A suite of smeary black-and-white drawings from the mid-nineteen-seventies have an eerily photographic effect—they could be portraits of afterglow. Turns out they were made from photocopier toner, while Whitten was an artist-in-residence at Xerox. Through Oct. 20. (Gray, 526 W. 26th St. 212-399-2636.)

"BETWEEN THOUGHT AND SOUND"
More than thirty composers submit experimental scores to this synesthetic drawing survey, subtitled "Graphic Notation in Contemporary Music." Abstract marks—fields of dots, color-coded grids, scatterings of numbers and letters—cipher aural complexity, and Rube Goldbergian diagrams (on computer and video screens as well as on paper) hint at melodies or dissonances unheard. Those already familiar with the composers—from Morton Feldman and Alvin Lucier to Laura Andel and Stephen Vitiello—may get the most from this seeing-as-hearing experience. To get others up to speed, a short performance series runs concurrently. Through Oct. 20. (The Kitchen, 512 W. 19th St. 212-255-5793.)

Short List

FOLKERT DE JONG: Cohan, 533 W. 26th St. 212-714-9500. Opens Oct. 20. **JILL GREENBERG:** ClampArt, 521-531 W. 25th St. 646-230-0020. Through Nov. 24. **MIRANDA LICHTENSTEIN:** Dee, 545 W. 20th St. 212-924-7545. Opens Oct. 20. **DAN MCCARTHY:** Kern, 532 W. 20th St. 212-367-9663. Opens Oct. 18. **JOHN MULLEN:** Scott, 529 W. 20th St. 646-486-7004. Through Nov. 3. **KONGTRÜL JIGME NAMGYEL:** Tibet House, 22 W. 15th St. 212-807-0563. Through Nov. 30. **WOLFGANG TILLMANS:** Rosen, 545 W. 24th St. 212-627-6000. Opens Oct. 18.

DVD NOTES

HEIL TO THE CHIEF

A seven-hour-long film about Hitler caused quite a stir when it was shown in New York in January, 1980. Hans-Jürgen Syberberg's **"Our Hitler"** (a two-disk set from Facets) is anything but a bio-pic. Its original German title, which translates as "Hitler, A Film from Germany," makes clear the scope of the director's ambition: to investigate Hitler as a psychic and aesthetic phenomenon, or, as is said in the film, as "fantasies of the mind and their blood realization."

Syberberg's technique is as phantasmagorical as the approach demands. The film is a collage of skits and masques, featuring actors doing antic impersonations of Hitler borrowed from Charlie Chaplin's "The Great Dictator," cardboard cutouts and marionettes, monologues and pantomimes, accompanied by historical sound clips of speeches by Hitler, his associates, and his enemies. Shot in a studio, these theatrical sketches rely on a device that became an instant classic: the projection of slides and films onto screens behind the actors and the sets, providing backdrops that could change instantly.

One bravura sequence features a half-hour monologue by a character identified as Hitler's valet (much time is spent on the foibles of the Führer's color coördination); another shows an actor doing Hitler as the Peter Lorre character in Fritz Lang's "M," a child murderer who bewails his compulsion to a threatening mob. The film's iconic image shows Hitler wearing a toga and rising from the grave of Richard Wagner. In Syberberg's view, Hitler was not only the fulfillment of German culture but of "the whole Western culture and the Christian God," and the defeat of Germany in the war did not mark Hitler's defeat but, rather, inaugurated the triumph of his ideas throughout Europe and the world. The spread of Communism in the East and of materialism in the West, the resurgence of anti-Semitism and of the death penalty—and, over all, what he calls "freedom without a human face"—all strike him as the elements of Hitler's victory.

Susan Sontag's enthusiasm for the film (she called it "one of the great works of art of the twentieth century") played a role in its American release. Francis Ford Coppola (who borrowed the rear-screen projection method for "One from the Heart") picked it up for distribution, and it played to sold-out houses at Lincoln Center and at Hunter College. Yet the film's influence was limited, perhaps due to its surprising impersonality. For all of his prodigious intellectual substance and theatrical ingenuity, Syberberg himself stays outside and above the fray, speculating invisibly on history from the hermetic enclosure of a studio. He may have got deep into the German psyche but he stayed resolutely outside his own.

—*Richard Brody*

GALLERIES—DOWNTOWN

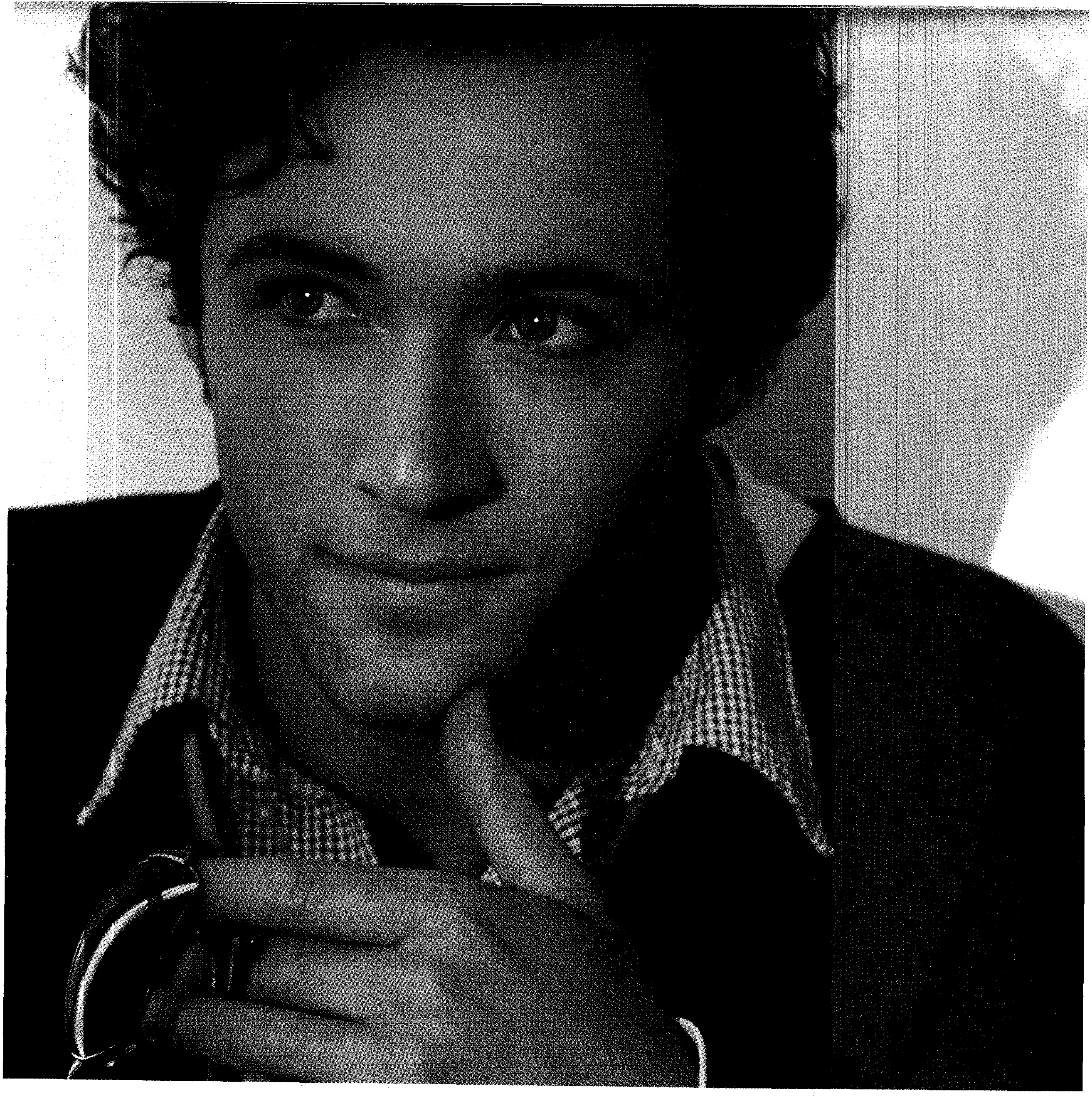
CAROL BOVE
Bove's latest show turns the gallery into a seductively cryptic labyrinth, ravishing in both its materials—a carpet of four thousand peacock feathers on a concrete plinth certainly qualifies—and its ideas. Hundreds of bronze rods are suspended from the ceiling just inside the entrance; they correspond to the position of the stars above the gallery at 9 P.M. on Oct. 21 of this year. Phillip Smith's recording of rushing water plays in a hallway. Shelves of books (art monographs, a William Gaddis novel, a Kabbalah notebook) act as talking points for this meandering contemplation of art, spirituality, and consciousness. At times the proceedings seem aleatory, at other times purposeful. Throughout, they are magical. Through Oct. 27. (Maccarone, 630 Greenwich St. 212-431-4977.)

JON KESSLER
Small collages sport faces, cut from magazines, that have been torn to bits, reassembled, and embellished with paint, yarn, shredded cash, and what a checklist cites as "artist's hair." The results are gruesome mash-ups, violent and handsome, united by scathing political commentary on the war on terror, on affronts to privacy, on the democratic process, and on decency. Rumsfeld, Ahmadinejad, and Putin all appear, adorned with sprouts of gray hair that make them look like hoary clowns; the familiar faces of starlets and fashion models take on monstrous forms. Kessler's Frankensteinian experiments seethe with disgust, but there's grace here, too, if little patience. Through Oct. 25. (Drawing Center, 40 Wooster St. 212-219-2166.)

HANNO OTTEN
This German photographer's vividly colored abstract images have been getting bigger with each exhibition, but the scale of his new work is still startling. At more than six feet tall, the pictures, derived from photograms, look like stained-glass windows conceived by a hip fifties graphic designer (Saul Bass, perhaps; there's a distinct "Vertigo" echo in the jazzy concentric circles). Otten undercuts the work's decorative effect by collapsing its geometry, keeping the colors tart and butting one hue up against another until they both shatter at the edges. Through Oct. 27. (Borden, 560 Broadway, at Prince St. 212-431-0166.)

GEORGINA STARR
Starr performs as Theda Bara, a silent-movie star all but forgotten in the age of Brangelina. As Starr runs through Bara's repertoire of stagy facial gestures in a twelve-minute video, her homage moves beyond imitation or appropriation—it's a fascinating study of human expression, a silver-screen update of Franz Xaver Messerschmidt. In another self-portrait, Starr restages a photograph of her mother dressed up for a party in the nineteen-seventies; an accompanying text describes her mother's near-pathological fear of aging. The two works may seem unrelated, but together they form a graceful meditation on an old postmodern saw: identity and role-playing are one and the same. Through Oct. 27. (Williams, 513 W. 4th St. 212-229-2757.)

"THE GEOMETRY OF HOPE: LATIN AMERICAN ABSTRACT ART"
A short list of materials employed in the service of postwar Latin-American abstraction reads: wood, copper wire, glass, rubber, burlap, and photographs—not to mention workaday paint on canvas. While North Americans were getting down and dirty with drips and impasto, their Latino counterparts were pushing the boundaries of shape and materials, challenging the idea of abstraction as flat and contained within a rectangle. Names like Ligia Clark, Jesús Rafael Soto, and Hélio Oiticica will be familiar to many viewers. But as the show of works from the collection of Patricia Phelps de Cisneros trots out lesser-known painters from São Paolo, Monte-



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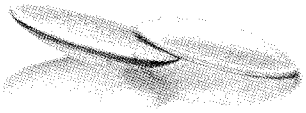

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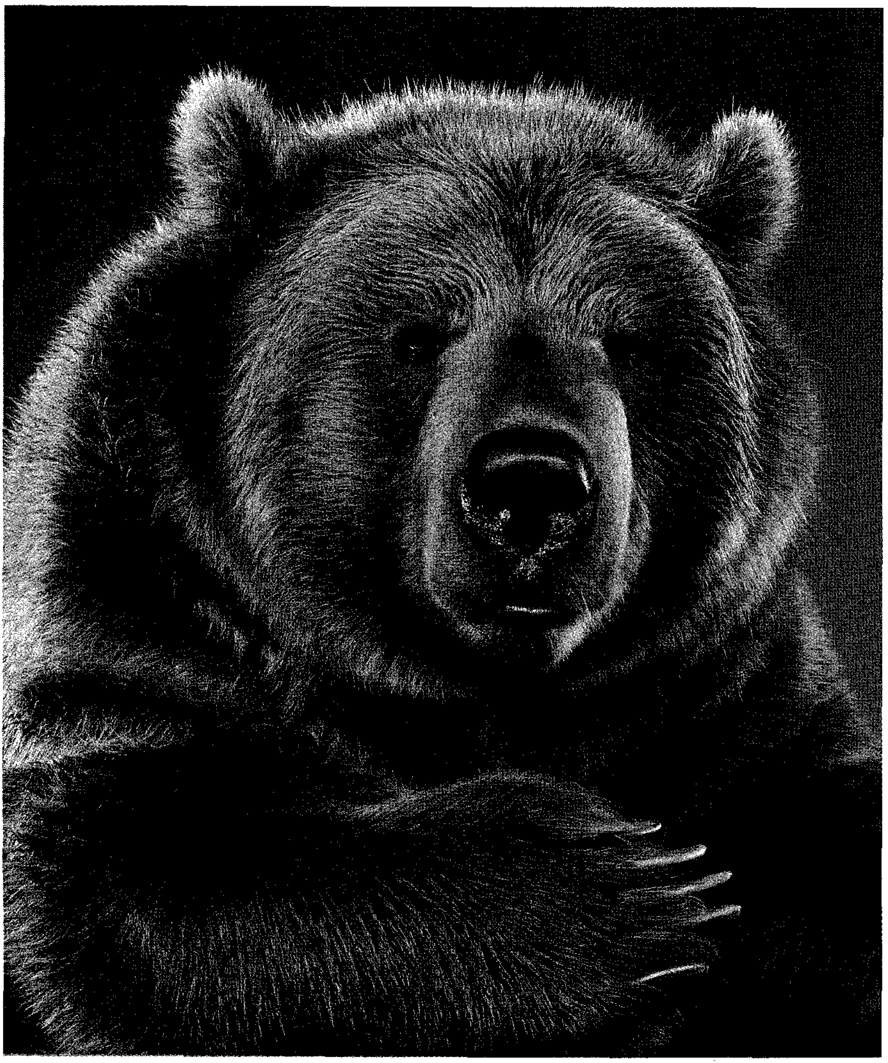


An untitled photograph in Jill Greenberg's exhibition "Ursine," at ClampArt.

video, and Buenos Aires, the embarrassment of riches makes the New York-centric view of mid-century abstraction look awfully provincial. Through Dec. 8. (Grey Art Gallery, 100 Washington Sq. E. 212-998-6789.)

Short List

HUMA BHABHA: Salon 94, at 1 Freeman Alley. 646-672-9212. Through Oct. 26. **MERLIN CARPENTER:** Spaulings, 165 East Broadway. 212-477-5006. Through Oct. 28. **MEL KENDRICK:** Nolan, 560 Broadway. 212-334-9139. Through Nov. 10. **MIKE NELSON:** Creative Time, 117 Delancey St. 212-206-6674. Through Nov. 1. **WILHELM SASNAL/SHIRANA SHAHBAZI:** Swiss Institute, 495 Broadway. 212-925-2035. Through Oct. 27. **FRANK STELLA:** Freeman, 560 Broadway. 212-966-5154. Through Nov. 7.

DANCE

AMERICAN BALLET THEATRE

The company returns to City Center for its fall season, devoted to mixed evenings of short works. As usual, there will be new ballets, one by the Finnish master of eccentric movement, Jorma Elo, and one by the New York City Ballet dancer and burgeoning choreographer Benjamin Millepied. The dancers will also take on Balanchine's Verdi ballet "Ballo della Regina" for the first time, as well as Twyla Tharp's dance-hall fantasy "Baker's Dozen," set to the proto-rags of Willie (the Lion) Smith. Antony Tudor's elegiac "The Leaves Are Fading" (1975) will return to the repertory, along with Agnes de Mille's true-crime ballet, "Fall River Legend," based on the story of Lizzie Borden. On Oct. 23, the opening-night gala features season highlights, including "Ballo" and "Fancy Free" as well as a series of pas de deux, from "The Leaves Are Fading," Stanton Welch's "Clear," and "Don Quixote." For a full schedule, visit www.abt.org. (131 W. 55th St. 212-581-1212. Oct. 23 at 6:30. Through Nov. 4.)

COMPAÑÍA NACIONAL DE DANZA

After a six-year absence, Spain's premier ensemble returns to New York with three strong dances by its director, Nacho Duato. Some of the themes are lurid: the gelded singers of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries in "Castrati," the modern ravages of drug abuse in "White Darkness." Yet most of the drama lies where it should, in the steps and the music. Duato's distortions of classical style are more expressive than sensational, and his expert ensemble etches them in fine detail. (BAM's Howard Gilman Opera House, 30 Lafayette Ave. 718-636-4100. Oct. 16 and Oct. 18-20 at 7:30.)

JAMES SEWELL BALLET

For its third season at the Joyce, Sewell's Minneapolis-based ensemble brings three new works that illustrate the choreographer's deep musical affinities. In "Opera Moves," Sewell delves into the opera repertoire for compelling imagery; in one moment, a dancer seems to levitate, held aloft on the waves of Wagner's "Liebestod," from "Tristan und Isolde." "Schoenberg Serenade" has a distinctly Balanchinean air, with its choice of rhythmically complicated music and its angular poses, simultaneously formal and jokey. "Kinetic Head" is the world première of an eight-minute solo for Sewell. (175 Eighth Ave., at 19th St. 212-242-0800. Oct. 16-17 at 7:30, Oct. 18-19 at 8, Oct. 20 at 2 and 8, and Oct. 21 at 2 and 7:30.)

MORPHOSES/THE WHEELDON COMPANY

The inaugural season for the young, prolific Christopher Wheeldon's new company features six Wheeldon ballets (all but two are New York premières), as well as works by two up-and-comers (Edwaard Liang and Liv Lorent) and two ballet iconoclasts (William Forsythe and Michael Clark). The dancers include the Brits Michael Nunn and William Trevitt (a.k.a. the Ballet Boyz); Ashley Bouder, Maria Kowroski, and Wendy Whelan, from the New York City Ballet; Anastasia Yatsenko of the Bolshoi; the recently retired Royal Ballet dancer Darcey Bussell; and, on Oct. 18-19, Alina Cojocaru and Johan Kobborg, also of the Royal. Live music will be provided by members of the Orchestra of St. Luke's. For a full program, see www.nycitycenter.org. (City Center, 131 W. 55th St. 212-581-1212. Oct. 17 at 7:30, Oct. 18 at 7, Oct. 19 at 8, Oct. 20 at 2 and 8, and Oct. 21 at 3.)

KORESH DANCE COMPANY

The high-energy troupe founded by the Israeli choreographer Ronen Koresh, popular in its home town of Philadelphia, makes its New York début in two free concerts. "Looking Back: The Music of the Forties and Fifties" is what it sounds like, a romp set to Benny Goodman, Elvis, Sinatra, and the like. The evening show, "Hidden Drives," exposes darker motivations and urges through four parallel narratives. (World Financial Center, 220 Vesey St. 212-945-0505. Oct. 17 at 12:30 and 7.)

NEW YORK BAROQUE DANCE COMPANY

Catherine Turocy's company of Baroque revivalists teams up with the Washington, D.C.-based period-instrument ensemble Opera Lafayette for a concert performance of the fanciful opéra-ballet "Zélindor, Roi des Sylphes." This one-act divertissement has not been seen for more than a century. (Rose Hall, Broadway and 60th St. 212-721-6500. Oct. 17 at 8.)

"BUTOH PARADE"

Japan Society's three-week festival continues with a première by Eiko & Koma. Decades ago, before leaving Japan to become the glacial-paced darlings of American dance, the pair studied with the Butoh founders Tatsumi Hijikata and Kazuo Ohno. "Mourning," a collaboration with the avant-garde pianist Margaret Leng Tan, mines the sorrow in compositions by John Cage, Bunita Marcus, and Somei Satoh, and gradually builds up a lamentation for the earth. (333 E. 47th St. 212-715-1258. Oct. 18-20 at 7:30. Through Oct. 27.)

SAM KIM

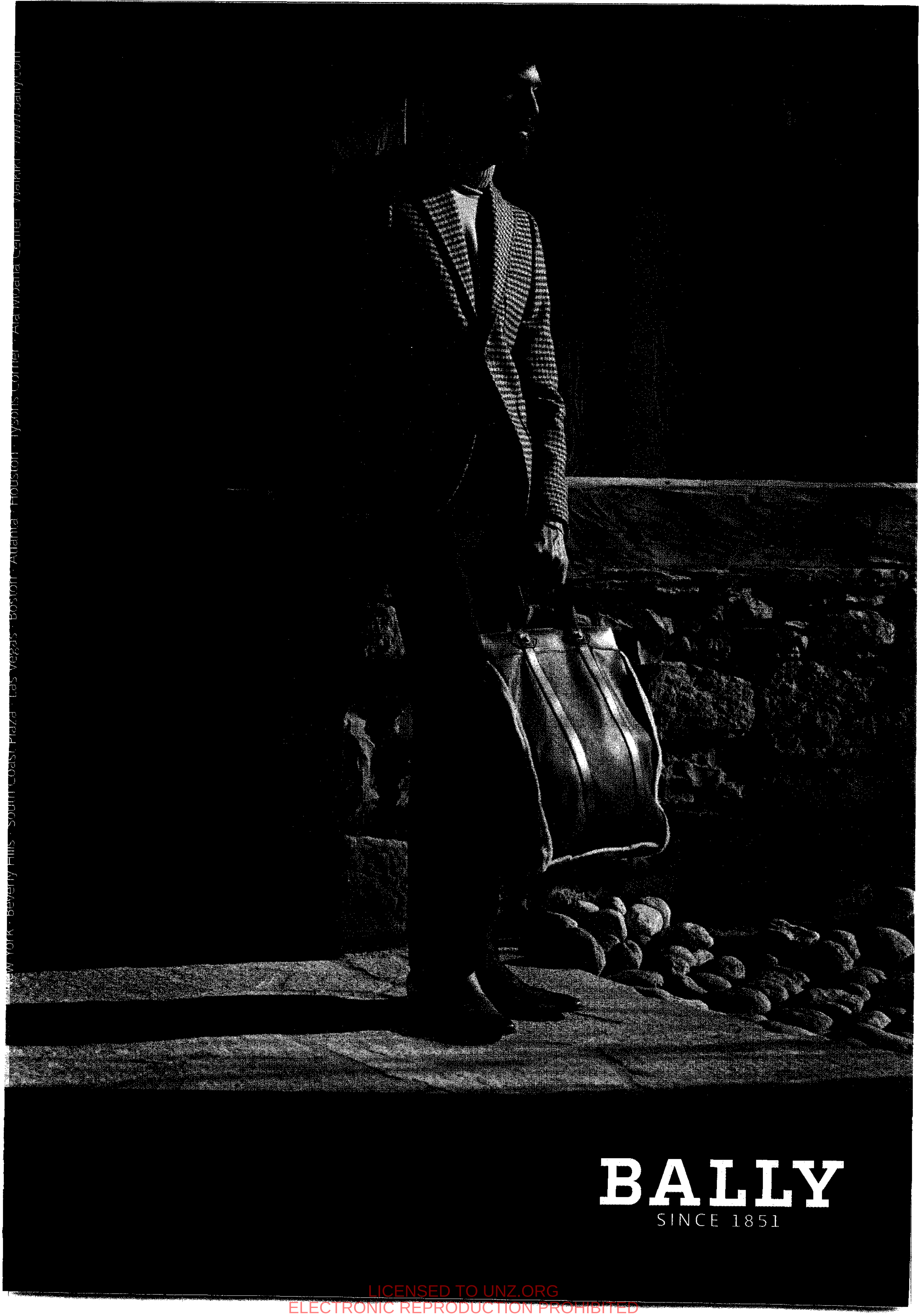
"Dumb Dumb Bunny" looks like a remake of "Dawn of the Dead" in which all the zombies are club kids. Set to a soundtrack that swerves from punk to hip-hop to disco to silence, a dozen dancers vamp and pose and gyrate. Even when they're not actually stiff-armed, their blank-faced affect resembles that of the undead, their stumblings those of toys whose batteries have run down. Still-lifes of bored bohemia make way for fervidly awkward couplings before the end. (The Kitchen, 512 W. 19th St. 212-255-5793, ext. 11. Oct. 18-20 at 8.)

BALLET FOLKLÓRICO DE MÉXICO DE AMALIA HERNÁNDEZ

Mexico's premier folkloric troupe, fifty-five years old, comes to the Beacon Theatre. The program is a typical stuffed piñata of pre-Hispanic rituals, earnest historical re-creations, and all sorts of regional festivals and traditions, including a lasso number and the signature finale, complete with the Mexican Hat Dance and streamers in the audience. Decked out in extravagant costumes and aided by sixteen musicians, the mammoth company always puts on a good show. (Broadway at 74th St. 212-307-7171. Oct. 18 at 8.)

"SPLICE"

Dance New Amsterdam presents a double bill of smart, politically engaged, and physically robust young choreographers. Alexandra Beller's "What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Comes After Happy" investigates the American obsession with outward shows of contentment, looking for answers in self-help manuals and game shows. Adele Myers's "Is That All There Is" tackles the stresses of motherhood with six women moving to ironically deployed pop songs. (280 Broadway, at Chambers St. 212-279-4200. Oct. 18-20 at 8 and Oct. 21 at 3.)

SENNICHIMAE BLUE SKY DANCE CLUB

This all-female troupe crosses two kinds of Japanese strangeness: Butoh extremity and infantilized pop. In party dresses and corpse-white makeup, they grimace and grin, scratch themselves and scarf down tofu. "A Bowl of Summer" draws on the Japanese Obon Festival, a kind of summer picnic with the dead. There's a giant melon head with flashing red eyes, and plastic bags full of water hanging from the ceiling. One moment the girls look like backup dancers for a hard-rock band, the next they're in the throes of death. (P.S. 122, 150 First Ave., at 9th St. 212-352-3101. Oct. 18-19 at 8, Oct. 20 at 2 and 8, and Oct. 21 at 6.)

PARIJAT DESAI

The Indian-born, American-educated Desai blends the centuries-old classical Indian dance form bharata natyam with a mix of postmodern and modern dance techniques, yoga, martial arts, and the spoken word. At Danspace, "Quiet/Fire," accompanied by an ensemble of talented musicians—including the sweet-voiced Shobana Ram—blends the percussive footwork and expressive head movements of bharata natyam with the balance and flow of Tai Chi and Tae Kwan Do. "The Wall" is more influenced by modern dance, especially Martha Graham. In "Malaysia," a new piece, the shapes of Indian dance are reduced to an essence. (St. Mark's In-the-Bowery, Second Ave. at 10th St. 212-674-8194. Oct. 18-20 at 8:30.)

CLASSICAL MUSIC

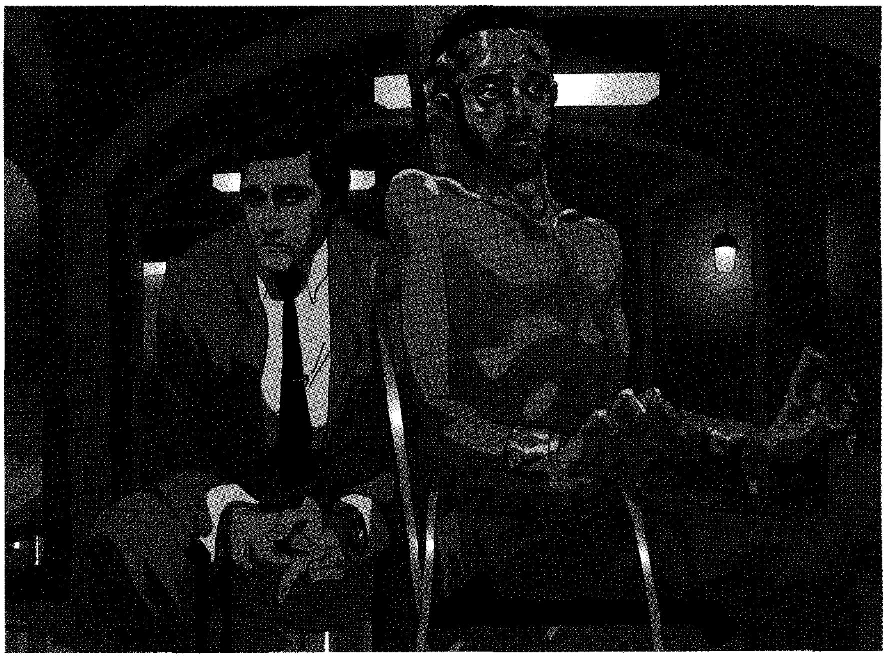
OPERA

METROPOLITAN OPERA

Mary Zimmerman's sober but involving new production of **"Lucia di Lammermoor"** features a glittering cast (including Marcello Giordani, Mariusz Kwiecien, and John Relyea) singing under the experienced direction of James Levine. (The soprano Annick Massis replaces Natalie Dessay in the title role.) (Oct. 17 and Oct. 20 at 8.) ♦ Jonathan Miller's production of **"Le Nozze di Figaro,"** with Hei-Kyung Hong, Lisette Oropesa, Michele Pertusi, and Erwin Schrott; Philippe Jordan, a fine young Mozartean, conducts. (Oct. 18 at 8.) ♦ The Met's new **"Madama Butterfly"** ushered in Peter Gelb's tenure last year with such brazen confidence that not a single patron has looked back. It's even more stunning in revival, with the exquisite Patricia Racette offering a tireless performance as the heartbroken Cio-Cio-San. In the filmmaker Anthony Minghella's production, fabrics twirl, lanterns move, and screens slide to create an enchanting cinematography for the stage. With Roberto Alagna, Maria Zifchak, and Luca Salsi; Mark Elder. (Oct. 19 and Oct. 23 at 8.) ♦ Sonja Frisell's grand production of **"Aida"** is so overpowering that it can easily survive the Met's rotating casts. The newest one features such estimable singers as Micaela Carosi, Olga Borodina, Marco Berti, Juan Pons, and Vitalij Kowaljow; Kazushi Ono. (Oct. 20 at 1:30.) ♦ Maria Guleghina, the forceful Russian soprano who has (gloriously) sung the role of Abigaille in the Met's production of Verdi's "Nabucco," returns to take on another punishing part—Lady Macbeth—in a new production (by Adrian Noble) of the same composer's **"Macbeth,"** one of the most complex and demanding of his creations; Željko Lučić, who made his Met début in last season's "La Giaconda," takes the title role. Also with Dimitri Pittas and John Relyea; Levine. (Oct. 22 at 8.) (Metropolitan Opera House. 212-362-6000.)

NEW YORK CITY OPERA

The current production of **"Agrippina,"** first seen in 2002, is Handel City Opera-style—nimble, light, and lusty. The wild card is Nelly Miricioiu (making her City Opera début), the Romanian-born British cult soprano who is renowned for her intense characterizations. Also with Heidi Stober, Jennifer Rivera, David Walker, David Korn, Marco Nisticò, and João Fernandes; Ransom Wilson conducts. (Oct. 18 at 8 and Oct. 20 at 1:30.) ♦ The Dallas Opera's production of **"Cavalleria Rusticana"** takes place in a nineteen-forties Sicilian village filled with colorful types: Santuzza is a black-clad martyr, Lola, a gum-smacking floozy in high heels, and Turiddu (Kip Wilborn), a vino-swilling cad demoralized by Italy's downfall. The music buckles under the weight of the director Stephen Lawless's near-farcical humor, but he nails Mascagni's cynical tone. The staging of Leoncavallo's **"Pagliacci"** will depend upon Carl Tanner and Elizabeth Caballero, who, as Canio and Nedda, portray two reluctant minstrels who give the performance of a lifetime in their final scene; George Manahan. (Oct. 19 at 8 and Oct. 21 at 1:30.) ♦ The admired American mezzo-soprano Beth Clayton should make a strong impression in the title role of **"Carmen,"** in which she shares the stage with a cast that includes Jennifer Black, Scott Piper, and Carlos Archuleta; Joseph Rescigno. (Oct. 20 at 8.) (New York State Theatre. 212-721-6500.)



Jake Gyllenhaal plays a C.I.A. agent and Omar Metwally a suspect in "Rendition."

TOMER HANUKA

ORCHESTRAS AND CHORUSES

NEW YORK PHILHARMONIC

With the orchestra's Tchaikovsky festival finally over, things will get a touch more adventurous at Avery Fisher Hall. James Conlon leads what will be the second outing this year for Alexander Zemlinsky's **"A Florentine Tragedy,"** one of two short operas for which the composer drew on literary works by Oscar Wilde. (The intrepid Leon Botstein conducted both of them last summer.) These concert performances feature the tenor Anthony Dean Griffey, the baritone James Johnson, and the soprano Tatiana Pavlovskaya; first on the program comes Beethoven's Piano Concerto No. 2 in B-Flat Major (itself something of a rarity), in which the orchestra will be joined by Jonathan Biss. (212-875-5656. Oct. 18 at 7:30, Oct. 19 at 2, and Oct. 20 at 8.)

CLEVELAND ORCHESTRA

Oct. 17 at 8: Franz Welser-Möst conducts the New York première of "Five Orchestral Pieces," by the formidable young German composer Matthias Pintscher, as the center of a concert that will also feature Debussy's "Ibéria" and Beethoven's Seventh Symphony. ♦ Oct. 18 at 8: The soprano Malin Hartelius, the mezzo-soprano Bernarda Fink, and the Westminster Symphonic Choir join the renowned orchestra for a performance of Mahler's Symphony No. 2, "Resurrection." (Carnegie Hall. 212-247-7800.)

LONDON SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA

The regular visits of this sterling ensemble (and its fine chorus) to Avery Fisher Hall have become victory laps for Colin Davis, who turns eighty this year and whose gift for delivering tensile, athletic, and admirably unpretentious performances is still intact. Oct. 17 at 8: The first evening is dedicated to music by Mozart—the Piano Concerto No. 27 in B-Flat Major (with Imogen Cooper) and the Requiem. ♦ Oct. 19 at 8: Next comes Beethoven, represented by the dreamy Fourth Piano Concerto (with Paul Lewis) and the trenchant Symphony No. 3, "Eroica." ♦ Oct. 21 at 3: The series ends with Haydn's glorious "Creation," in which the forces are joined by three distinctive soloists: the soprano Sally Matthews, the tenor Ian Bostridge, and the baritone Dietrich Henschel. (212-721-6500.)

AMERICAN COMPOSERS ORCHESTRA

A decidedly edgy tone pervades this group's "underground" performances at Zankel Hall. This one features works by four leading avant-gardists (Steve Coleman, Susie Ibarra, Scott Johnson, and Ken Thompson), along with a modern classic, Charles Mingus's "Revelations"; Steven Sloane conducts. (212-247-7800. Oct. 19 at 7:30.)

ORPHEUS CHAMBER ORCHESTRA

The conductorless chamber orchestra stretches its abilities to the limit in its first concert of the season. For Brahms's massive First Piano Concerto, they team up with the magnificent Yefim Bronfman; they then go it alone in Schoenberg's Chamber Symphony, Op. 9. (Carnegie Hall. 212-247-7800. Oct. 23 at 8.)

CLARION MUSIC SOCIETY

The young American conductor Steven Fox launches the new season of the distinguished early-music orchestra, recently revived, with a program featuring not only music by Joseph Haydn's brother Michael Haydn (including the "Requiem pro defuncto Archiepiscopo Sigismundo") but also two choral works by one of Michael's younger fans—Mozart. (St. Michael's Church, Amsterdam Ave. at 99th St. 212-866-0468. Oct. 23 at 8.)

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RECITALS

NEW YORK FESTIVAL OF SONG
In "No Song Is Safe from Us," the festival—twenty years old in 2008—opens its season with a smorgasbord of songs by such wildly eclectic creators as Bernstein, Blitzstein, Sibelius, Villa-Lobos, and Bob Dylan. Jennifer Aylmer and William Sharp are among the singers; Steven Blier and Michael Barrett are at the piano. (Weill Recital Hall, Carnegie Hall. 212-247-7800. Oct. 16 and Oct. 18 at 8.)

VLADIMIR FELTSMAN
Music of Haydn, Chopin, and Mussorgsky ("Pictures at an Exhibition") is the focus for the searching pianist's latest recital, at the Museum of Jewish Heritage. (36 Battery Pl. 646-437-4202. Oct. 17 at 7.)

CHAMBER MUSIC SOCIETY OF LINCOLN CENTER
The society's Russian bent continues with a concert by the indisputably authentic St. Petersburg Quartet, which offers the First String Quartets of both Borodin and Tchaikovsky along with the New York première of the Georgian composer Zurab Nadarejshvili's Quartet No. 2. (New York Society for Ethical Culture, Central Park W. at 64th St. 212-875-5788. Oct. 17 at 7:30.)

INTERNATIONAL CONTEMPORARY ENSEMBLE
The exceptional group, which spends much of its time in Chicago, descends on New York for a slew of concerts—including an electro-acoustic affair at Brooklyn's Issue Project Room, which features new works by Nathan Davis, Mario Diaz de Leon, and Panayiotis Kokoras. (232 3rd St., at Third Ave. 718-330-0313. Oct. 17 at 8.)

BARGEMUSIC
It's a pretty funky week at the floating chamber-music series. Oct. 17 and Oct. 19 at 8: Paula Robison, famous as a flutist, makes a lunge into chanteuse territory as the singer-reciter of Schoenberg's "Pierrot Lunaire"; two of the other performers, the cellist Eric Jacobsen and the violinist Colin Jacobsen, team up with the pianist Steven Beck for duos by Janáček and Strauss (the Sonata for Violin and Piano), respectively. ♦ Oct. 20 at 8 and Oct. 21 at 4: The barge's director, Mark Peskanov, appears as soloist in an all-Beethoven program (featuring the Fourth Symphony and the Violin Concerto) with the plucky Chelsea Symphony. (Fulton Ferry Landing, Brooklyn. 718-624-2083.)

MILLER THEATRE COMPOSER PORTRAITS: WOLFGANG RIHM
Rihm's "Jagden und Formen" ("Hunts and Forms") is a searing, relentless fifty-minute symphony for chamber orchestra and one of the undisputed masterworks of the past decade; Jeffrey Milarsky conducts a performance by the Manhattan Sinfonietta. (Columbia University, Broadway at 116th St. 212-854-7799. Oct. 18 at 8.)

MICHAEL HARRISON'S "REVELATION"
Harrison, a composer-pianist who is a hero in what might be called the alternative-tuning community, performs his meditative CD-length creation (deeply influenced by North Indian ragas) in two concerts at the Chelsea Museum of Art. (556 W. 22nd St. 212-255-0719. Oct. 18-19 at 8.)

CHRISTIAN GERHAHER
A young German baritone of astonishing interpretive maturity comes to Carnegie's Weill Recital Hall with his excellent pianist, Gerold Huber, to perform Schubert's immortal "Die Schöne Mullerin." (212-247-7800. Oct. 19 at 7:30.)

ANDRÁS SCHIFF
The probing Hungarian pianist, never one to do things halfway, launches a two-year survey of the complete Beethoven sonatas at Carnegie Hall that begins at the beginning—with the Sonatas Nos. 1-4. (212-247-7800. Oct. 21 at 2.)

ZUKERMAN CHAMBER PLAYERS
Pinchas Zukerman's new venture—a string quintet—offers a concert at the 92nd Street Y in which the violinist joins his colleagues (and the Escher String Quartet) for a program of works by Mozart and Mendelssohn (the Quintet No. 1 in A Major and the Octet). (Lexington Ave. at 92nd St. 212-415-5500. Oct. 21 at 3.)

PHILIP SEYMOUR HOFFMAN AND THE TAKÁCS QUARTET
Words and music will glamorously combine at Zankel Hall when the compelling actor joins the equally persuasive chamber ensemble for a concert in which readings of excerpts from Philip Roth's novel "Everyman" will alternate with works for string quartet by Glass and Pärt; a performance of Schubert's "Death and the Maiden" Quartet and Hoffman's reading of the Matthias Claudius poem that inspired it follow. (212-247-7800. Oct. 23 at 7:30.)

MOVIES OPENING

BLACK WHITE + GRAY
A documentary about the curator Sam Wagstaff and his relationship with the photographer Robert Mapplethorpe. Directed by James Crump. Opening Oct. 19. (Cinema Village.)

THE COMEBACKS
In this comedy, a college football coach (David Koechner) fills his team with ringers. Directed by Tom Brady. Opening Oct. 19. (In wide release.)

DARKBLUEALMOSTBLACK
A drama, directed by Daniel Sánchez Arévalo, about two men whose love lives are limited by family obligations. In Spanish. Opening Oct. 19. (Quad Cinema.)

GONE, BABY, GONE
Ben Affleck directed and co-wrote this crime drama, about two Boston detectives who investigate the kidnapping of a child. Starring Casey Affleck, Morgan Freeman, and Michelle Monaghan. Opening Oct. 19. (In wide release.)

MEETING RESISTANCE
A documentary about eight Iraqi insurgents and their diverse motives for fighting, directed by Molly Bingham and Steve Connors. Opening Oct. 19. (Cinema Village.)

O JERUSALEM
An adaptation of the novel by Larry Collins and Dominique Lapierre, about the founding of Israel. Directed by Elie Chouraqui; with Maria Papas and Patrick Bruel. Opening Oct. 17. (Village East Cinemas.)

OUT OF THE BLUE
A drama about a serial killer, based on a true story; directed by Robert Sarkies. Opening Oct. 19. (IFC Center.)

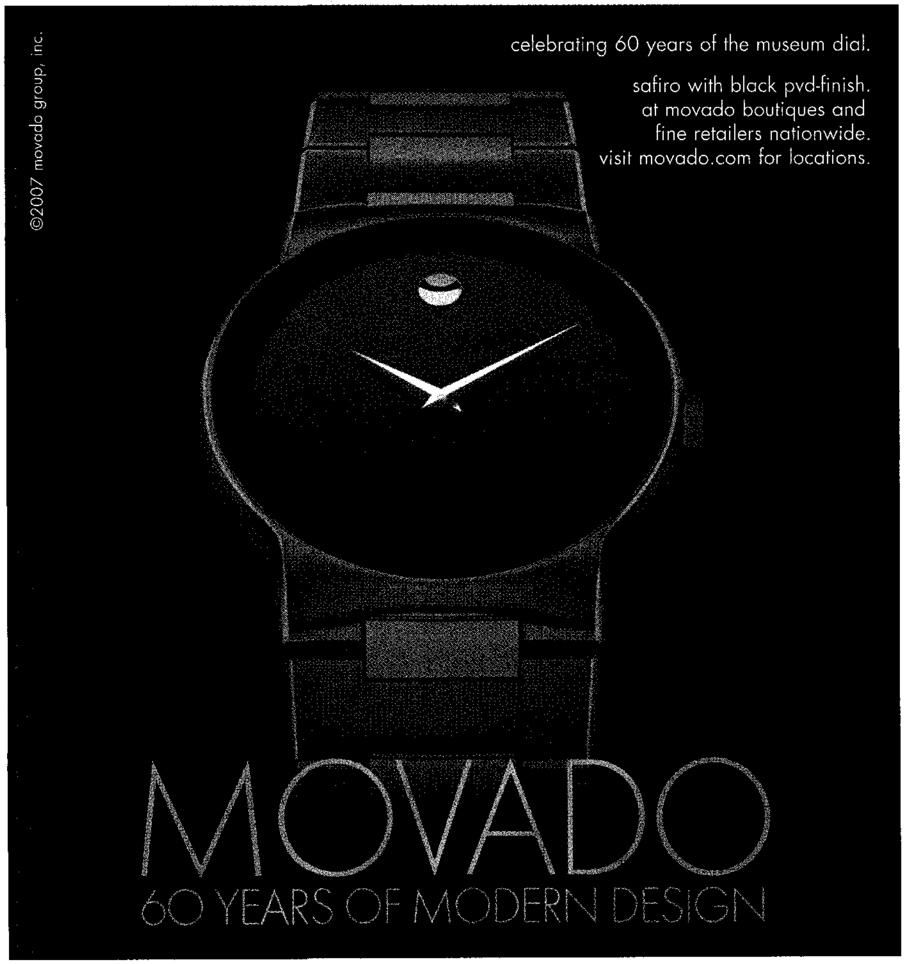
RENDITION
An American is taken abroad for a secret interrogation, and a young C.I.A. agent is compelled to participate. Starring Jake Gyllenhaal, Reese Witherspoon, Meryl Streep, and Alan Arkin. Directed by Gavin Hood. Opening Oct. 19. (In wide release.)

RESERVATION ROAD
Reviewed below in Now Playing. Opening Oct. 19. (In wide release.)

THINGS WE LOST IN THE FIRE
In this drama, a widow (Halle Berry) begins a relationship with her late husband's best friend (Benicio Del Toro). Co-starring David Duchovny and Alison Lohman; directed by Susanne Bier. Opening Oct. 19. (In wide release.)

30 DAYS OF NIGHT
A horror movie, directed by David Slade, based on a comic book about vampires who attack an Alaskan town. Starring Josh Hartnett, Ben Foster, Melissa George, and Danny Huston. Opening Oct. 19. (In wide release.)

WRISTCUTTERS: A LOVE STORY
A romantic fantasy about a man who seeks his former lover in a purgatory reserved for the victims of suicide. Starring Patrick Fugit, Shannyn Sossamon, and Tom Waits. Directed by Goran Dukić. Opening Oct. 19. (Empire 25 and Union Square.)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ACROSS THE UNIVERSE
Julie Taymor, who staged "The Lion King" and directed a hallucinogenic film version of "Titus Andronicus," lavishes all her visual genius on this overscaled production, which connects almost three dozen Beatles songs with the thinnest thread of a story. Set in the mid-sixties, the film is about an English boy from Liverpool (Jim Sturgess) who moves to Greenwich Village and meets a beautiful, soon to be radicalized girl (Evan Rachel Wood); together with her Vietnam-bound brother, they embark on the trippy adventures of the era. The film is populated with characters named Jude, Lucy, JoJo, Prudence, and Sadie, and the Beatles songs have been reworked (by Elliot Goldenthal and T-Bone Burnett) for the varying degrees of musical talent on display (Bono is fantastic; Eddie Izzard, less so). Because the screenplay is light on dialogue and most of the story is told through the songs, the film never really gets a thorough hold on any of its characters—it's cameo-friendly but emotionally neutered. Still, it's an audacious and creatively risky wonder, with enough visual pizzazz amid the insanity to capture the spirit of those turbulent times.—*Bruce Diones* (In wide release.)

THE ASSASSINATION OF JESSE JAMES BY THE COWARD ROBERT FORD
Seven years ago, Andrew Dominik directed a film called "Chopper," a brisk and alarming account of a career criminal whose infamy has shaded into legend. Now he has done it again—at greater length, with bigger stars, far fewer laughs, and only a fraction of the effect. Brad Pitt plays Jesse James, who is at the tail end of his career and joins up with his brother, Frank (Sam Shepard), for one last train robbery, then spends the rest of the story skulking under an alias or settling scores. James also humors his young admirer, Robert Ford (Casey Affleck), who starts off wanting to imitate his hero and ends up killing him. The film concludes with a fascinating, if sketchy, account of Ford's own celebrity, but it can hardly compensate for the sluggish indulgence of the preceding couple of hours. The film dies long before Jesse James does; such liveliness as there is springs from the subplots and bit parts—notably from Paul Schneider as Dick Liddil, a much better Lothario than he was an outlaw. Photographed, to the hilt, by Roger Deakins.—*Anthony Lane* (Reviewed in our issue of 10/1/07.) (In wide release.)

LA COLLECTIONNEUSE
Eric Rohmer's second feature, from 1966, announces its carnal conceit from the first scene's anatomical closeups of the waiflike, bikini-clad Haydée (Haydée Politoff). She shares a friend's villa on the Riviera with Daniel (Daniel Pommereulle), a single artist, and Adrien (Patrick Bauchau), a dilettantish art dealer who is engaged to be married, and the two men vie for her in a most dignified way. The natural splendors of blue water, rocky shore, bright sky, and hilly terrain provide a serene setting for the eternal struggle of man versus man, man versus woman, and man versus his own worst instincts. Adrien is the film's central consciousness and voice-over narrator, and the personal price of his impending summer fling forms the core of Rohmer's moral psychology. A Ming vase and a voracious American collector (played by the film critic Eugene Archer, under the pseudonym of Seymour Hertzberg) offer the symbolism. And, as a tête-à-tête between Daniel and the writer Alain Jouffroy suggests, Rohmer sees the artistic avant-garde as the front line of the sexual revolution—for better or for worse. In French.—*Richard Brody* (BAM; Oct. 17.)

EASTERN PROMISES
The new David Cronenberg film, set among Russian mobsters in London, stars Viggo Mortensen as Nikolai, a part-time chauffeur and full-time threat. He takes care of business for Semyon (Armin Mueller-Stahl), a soft-spoken restaurateur with frightening blue eyes, and Semyon's whining son (Vincent Cassel). Into this murk comes Anna (Naomi Watts), a midwife who is trying to trace the family of an orphaned Russian child. What Cronenberg and his screenwriter, Steve Knight, want to engineer is a col-

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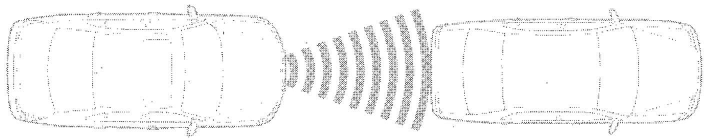

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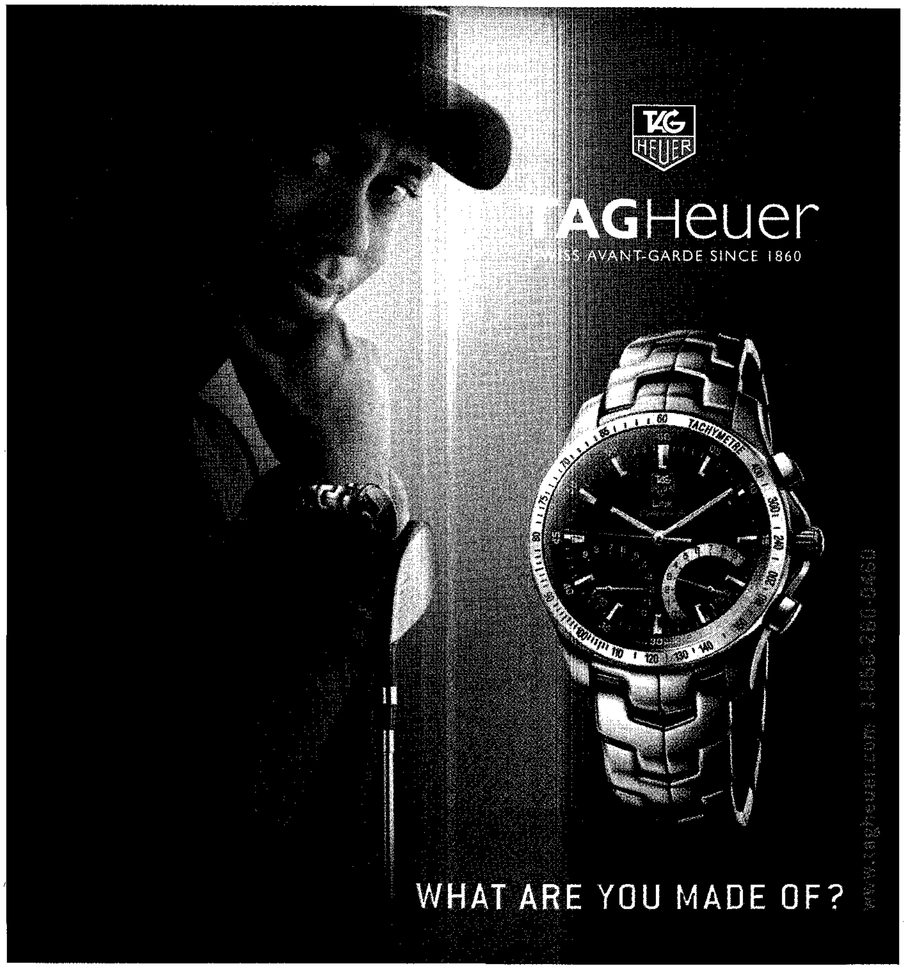

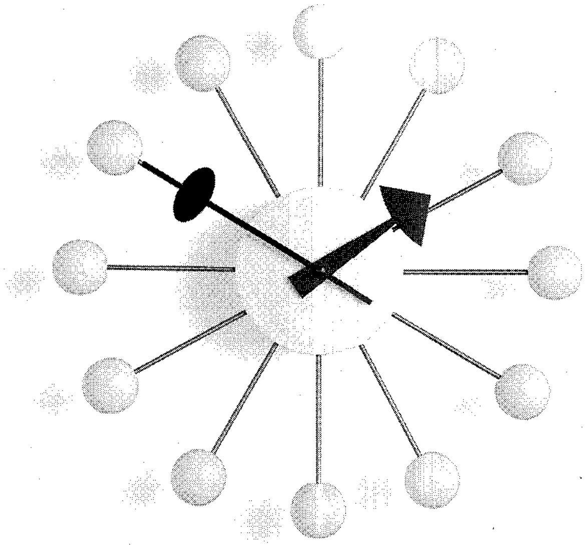

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lision between worlds that have nothing—no social habits or moral norms—in common. The result, despite the modern setting, is a strangely old-fashioned fable, with a redeeming innocent thrown among evil men. There is no denying the momentum of the story, or Mortensen's shade-wearing composure, but some of the casting (Cassel especially) is askew, and the tone keeps lurching from the sombre into the ghastly as Cronenberg strives to maintain his reputation as a master bloodletter. You may need to look away. With the compelling, cadaverous Donald Sumpter (last seen in "The Constant Gardener") as an English cop.—*A.L.* (9/17/07) (In wide release.)

ELIZABETH: THE GOLDEN AGE

Cate Blanchett, Geoffrey Rush, and the director Shekhar Kapur reunite for the second chapter of a planned trilogy about the life of the sixteenth-century English Queen who sacrificed personal happiness for the good of her country. The title is misleading; the movie is concerned with the bloody actions that were a prelude to England's golden age. Here, Elizabeth is the warrior queen, and the various plots of the film—her unrequited love for Walter Raleigh (Clive Owen), her country's war with the mighty Spanish Armada, and the assassination attempt by her rival and cousin, Mary Stuart (a scene-stealing Samantha Morton)—are thrown together like a shoddy patchwork. Where the earlier film's court intrigues were delivered with a sharp tongue, this poorly written installment has a soap-opera feel that dilutes any tension. Great care has been paid to the costuming, but the drama, like the over-the-top score, substitutes bombast for finesse.—*B.D.* (In wide release.)

THE END OF THE WORLD

The term "Danish realism" may ring strange, but this silent dramatic fantasy by August Blom, from 1916, goes a long way to canonize it. The plot concerns a stock-market mogul who marries a small-town gold-digger and brings her to the big city. There, he gets word from his astronomer brother about a comet that is likely to bring disaster to Western Europe, and he manipulates the information to his advantage. Going back to the town to take care of business, he and his wife get caught in a vortex of simmering resentments—and then the comet strikes, to devastating and spectacular effect. Blom's direction is stunningly attentive to the way things look and feel; from the windblown rural meadows to the shimmering waves to the terrifying fire falling from the sky, the natural and the supernatural seem to be happening tangibly before a viewer's astonished eyes. A dance, a riot, a stock-market uproar all unfold gradually and ambiguously, like life and nothing more.—*R.B.* (BAM; Oct. 21.)

THE HEARTBREAK KID

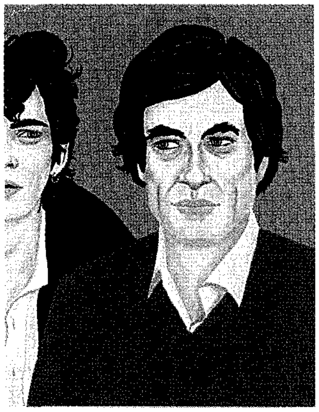
The Farrelly brothers' extroverted remake of Elaine May's anxious 1972 comedy, about a man who falls in love with another woman while on his honeymoon, is painfully unfunny yet oddly engrossing. As Eddie Cantrow, the "sporting-goods schmo" who finds he has married in haste, Ben Stiller does his beleaguered-Everyman routine with energy. Malin Akerman, as the bride whose emerging foibles bring trouble, and Michelle Monaghan, as the available charmer at the resort, hold up their ends. But it's the Farrellys' revisions to the familiar tale that make the film run. Where the earlier version featured Cybill Shepherd as the irresistible shiksa goddess, Monaghan plays not a pinup but a soulmate—indeed, Akerman is the prettier of the two, and her sexual voracity turns Eddie off. But the key to the story is a new pair of characters—Eddie's father, a raunchy seventy-seven-year-old satyr, played by Jerry Stiller, and Eddie's best friend (Rob Corddry), a henpecked young husband—who, like a cartoon devil and angel on Eddie's shoulders, induce him to leap blindly into wedlock. Though the Farrelly brothers' vulgar humor has turned acrid and forced, as if to catch up with currents that passed them by, their notion of manhood and its pitfalls holds the attention.—*R.B.* (In wide release.)

IN THE VALLEY OF ELAH

The deadpan American hipster Tommy Lee Jones gives the performance of a lifetime in this sombre but fascinating movie, playing a former Army man, Hank Deerfield, whose son, Mike (Jonathan Tucker), after serving in Iraq, has gone AWOL in

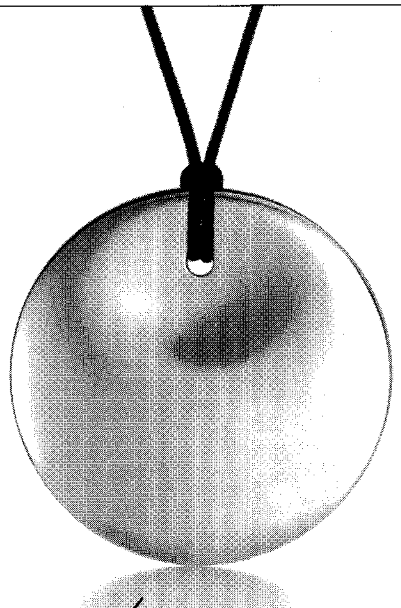
DIVYA SRINIVASAN

CRITIC'S NOTEBOOK
THE COLLECTOR



Although Sam Wagstaff was a prescient, adventurous curator and connoisseur—a man who helped shape the current boom market for photography—he is much better known as the lover and mentor of Robert Mapplethorpe. When Mapplethorpe died, in 1989, two years after Wagstaff, his fame, inflated by his notoriety, had all but eclipsed his mentor's. James Crump's fascinating documentary, "Black White + Gray," opening Oct. 19 at Cinema Village, aims to redress that imbalance by providing a vivid portrait of Wagstaff, largely through interviews with his surviving friends and colleagues, but even more tellingly through the photographs that he amassed. "The first bold and brave collector to use photographs as a way of constructing a kind of self-portrait," one observer calls him. Savvy, charismatic, and devilishly handsome, Wagstaff found the perfect foil and goad in Mapplethorpe, but it was the collector, not the photographer, who left the most indelible and idiosyncratic mark on the medium they shared.

—*Vince Aletti*



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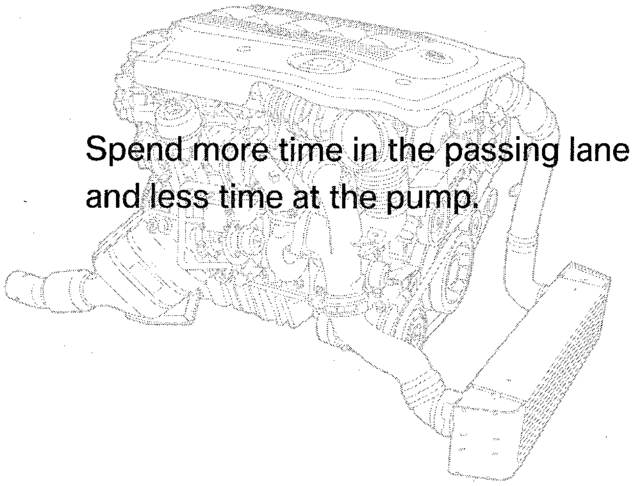

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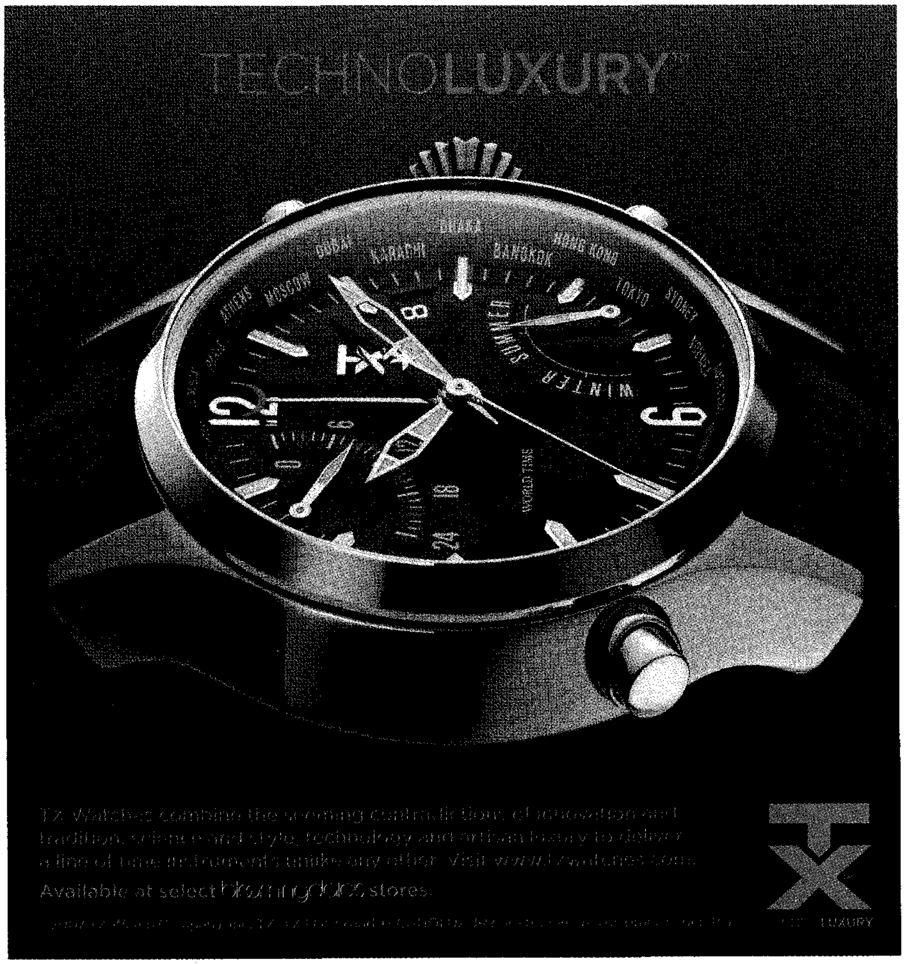

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America. When the young man's body turns up, burned and dismembered, near a base in New Mexico, Hank joins forces with a local police detective (Charlize Theron) to find out what happened. The picture, written and directed by Paul Haggis, is a detailed police procedural encasing a technological and metaphysical lunge at the truth. As Hank looks for Mike's killers, he also tries to interpret the fragmented war scenes that his son recorded on his camera phone. The emotional center is the bond between two generations of warriors—Hank's fear that his son has gone feral, and Mike's anguished attempt to communicate what has happened to him through pictures. The tone of the film is wounded and ambiguous; it's the very opposite of a tearjerker.—*David Denby* (9/24/07) (In limited release.)

INTO THE WILD

Sean Penn wrote and directed this adaptation of Jon Krakauer's chastely written 1996 book about Christopher Johnson McCandless, the Emory University graduate who, at the age of twenty-two, cut all ties with his family and friends, tramped around the country, and then headed north into the wilds of Alaska, where he died, alone, in August, 1992. A single-minded asceticism drove McCandless to his fate; Penn shoots the movie, however, in a facile, commercially lyrical style—he can't stop swirling around mountaintops, as if he were selling S.U.V.s. As the young man (played by Emile Hirsch) travels about, he attracts the interest of a South Dakota wheat farmer (Vince Vaughn, playing it straight), an aging hippie (Catherine Keener), and a retired Army man living on the edge of the California desert (Hal Holbrook), all of whom ask him to put down his backpack and stay. He always leaves, and it may be hard for some of us to take his ambitions as seriously as Penn does. McCandless didn't experience enough of life for his rejection of it to carry much weight, and Penn can't see the egocentricity in a revolt that was as naïve as it was grandly self-destructive.—*D.D.* (10/8/07) (In wide release.)

THE KINGDOM

After a murderous attack on an American compound in Riyadh, a covert team of F.B.I. agents—Jamie Foxx, Jennifer Garner, Chris Cooper, and Jason Bateman—is flown in, against the wishes of the State Department, to explore the crime. There are severe restrictions on their activities in Saudi Arabia, although, thanks to the cunning of the writer, Matthew Michael Carnahan, and the director, Peter Berg, these are quietly lifted, allowing our heroes to round off the movie in a noisy blaze of firepower. Berg shows his skill at orchestrating these brassy scenes, so much so that you almost forget the absurdities of the plot (was it wise to send a female forensic scientist to a Muslim country?) and almost forgive the hard-nosed vengefulness of the whole enterprise. Wait for the final line: it's clever and loaded, and it makes the movie seem far more poised and pensive than it actually was. With a fine performance by Ashraf Barhom as the Saudi investigator.—*A.L.* (10/1/07) (In wide release.)

LUST, CAUTION

Reviewed this week in The Current Cinema. (In limited release.)

MICHAEL CLAYTON

A gabby, irresistibly entertaining New York thriller. Michael Clayton (George Clooney), a law-firm fixer of dubious ethics, is dispatched to rein in the firm's chief litigator (Tom Wilkinson), a high-strung guy who has discovered a document that incriminates one of the firm's clients and has responded by going off his meds and out of his mind. Michael, it turns out, is only slightly less disgusted by the dirty business than the litigator is, and the movie catches him during a period of four frantic days in which all the strains in his life are pushing him to the breaking point. The screenwriter Tony Gilroy both directed and wrote the movie, and he keeps the tension level high—too high at times; the movie needs to breathe more. Yet the inside-the-law-firm chatter and poker-table badinage come off superbly. Clooney, looking a little haggard, gives a lovely performance as a smart man who has a few too many scruples to be a winner. With Tilda Swinton and Sydney Pollack. Cinematography by Robert Elswit.—*D.D.* (10/8/07) (In wide release.)

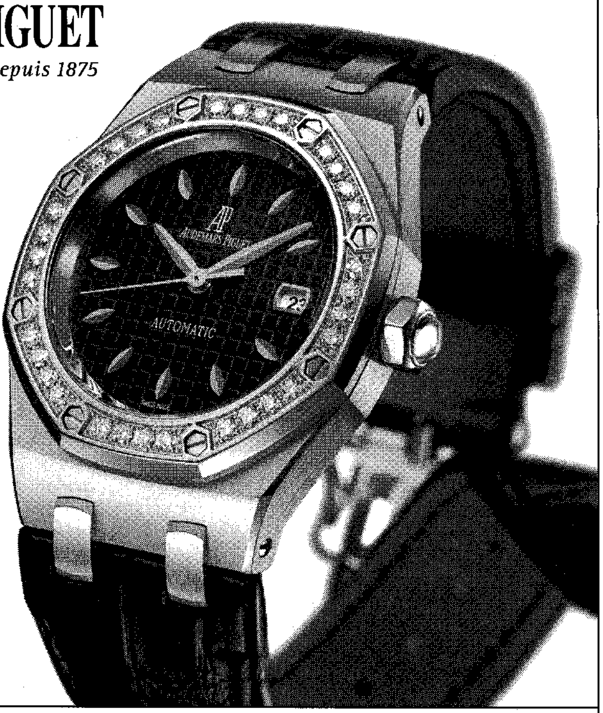
MY KID COULD PAINT THAT
Amir Bar-Lev directed this disquieting documentary, centered on the family of Marla Olmstead, a four-year-old girl who became a media sensation in 2004, when her abstract paintings began to sell for thousands of dollars. Bar-Lev conceived of the film as an exploration of the meaning of modern art and its perceived value, but then, in the midst of filming, Charlie Rose ran an exposé on "60 Minutes II" in which a child psychologist opined that Marla was not the sole painter of the works that had been sold. The filmmaker himself begins to doubt the veracity of the claims made by Marla's parents, Laura (a sweet woman who abhors the media attention once it turns ugly) and Mark (whose exuberance and caginess remain constant throughout). When Bar-Lev asks Laura and Mark point-blank whether they might have helped Marla a little and got in over their heads, their straight-faced reactions, ending with Laura in tears, do less to alleviate doubts than to add a layer of discomfort, which is all the more dismaying because no one wins.—*Shauna Lyon* (Angelika Film Center and Lincoln Plaza Cinemas.)

RESERVATION ROAD
The writer-director Terry George ("Hotel Rwanda") plumbs the depths of grief in this gloomy thriller, which he adapted with John Burnham Schwartz from Schwartz's novel. The perfectly happy Ethan (Joaquin Phoenix) and Grace (Jennifer Connelly) lose their ten-year-old son when Dwight (Mark Ruffalo), a divorced father, hits him with his S.U.V. and, after a moment of hesitation, drives away. In an attempt to portray the full extent of the family's mourning and to capture the full horror of the unjust tragedy, the writers, through their formulaic, humorless script, hit the same notes repeatedly, and even the talented Phoenix and Ruffalo can't elevate the proceedings.—*S.L.* (In wide release.)

ROMANCE & CIGARETTES
Why do the cheesiest pop tunes make the most effective soundtrack songs? Here the culprit is Engelbert Humperdinck's "A Man Without Love," the first number in the director John Turturro's inspired and stimulating quasi-musical creation. James Gandolfini plays Nick, an ironworker who lives in Queens with his wife (Susan Sarandon) and three daughters (the quirkily cast Mary-Louise Parker, Aida Turturro, and Mandy Moore) but is in the throes of a surprising affair with the hotter-than-hot Tula (Kate Winslet, in an astoundingly lascivious and funny performance). Turturro has his actors sing along with the recorded voices, and the effect is surreal and touching—they all appear to be having the time of their lives. With matching, witty, working-class choreography by Tricia Brouk.—*Ken Marks* (In limited release.)

SLEUTH
A depressing botch. Harold Pinter's script reduces the familiar 1972 mystery gag—about an actor who enters the lair of the writer whose wife he has stolen and gets caught in his trap—to an artificially grim and hopelessly implausible contest of will and game of shifting identities. Jude Law, as the actor, and Michael Caine, as the writer (he played the actor in the original), can do little but chew the overdone scenery, and the director, Kenneth Branagh, tries to save the day with coy and portentous tricks. A musty scene of Law's ostensibly sinister homosexual vamping suggests that Pinter hasn't got out much lately.—*R.B.* (In wide release.)

TERROR'S ADVOCATE
Barbet Schroeder's fascinating, appalling documentary portrait of the French attorney Jacques Vergès, who enthusiastically represented Klaus Barbie, Carlos the Jackal, and other innocent bystanders, is about much more than one man's delusions. The film traces Vergès's life and work (with his vigorous participation), from the racial discrimination he faced in his youth (his mother was from Vietnam, his father from Réunion) to his first major case, the defense of the Algerian militant Djamila Bouhired, who planted a bomb in an Algiers café in 1956, killing eleven people. Saving Bouhired from the death penalty by mobilizing international sympathy, Vergès then married her and avoided politics until the mid-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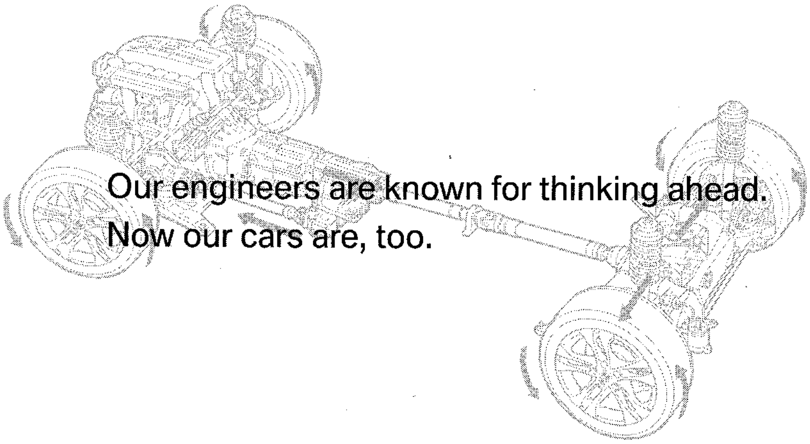
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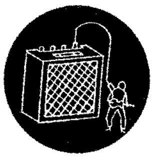
sixties, when he represented Palestinian terrorists and became a Maoist. Then, after dropping out of sight for a few years, he worked for the Baader-Meinhof gang and other agents of destruction. With probing interviews, intrepid legwork, and sharp editing, Schroeder exposes an underground network that hijacked the anti-colonialist movement from behind the Iron Curtain with the help of unregenerated Nazis and other anti-liberals. With regret, he locates the roots of international terrorism in the ruthless tactics of Algerian independence fighters. The story Schroeder unfolds is not just Vergès's but also his own, that of a generation that had its humanistic sympathies manipulated and abused by radically unscrupulous people with agendas of horror. In French, German, English, Arabic, and Khmer.—*R.B.* (IFC Center and Lincoln Plaza Cinemas.)

WE OWN THE NIGHT
Reviewed this week in The Current Cinema. (In wide release.)

Also Playing

FEAST OF LOVE: In wide release. **THE FINAL SEASON:** In wide release. **KING CORN:** Cinema Village. **LARS AND THE REAL GIRL:** Angelika Film Center and Paris. **WHY DID I GET MARRIED?:** In wide release.



POP NOTES
CHROME NEVER SLEEPS

Neil Young's umpteenth studio album, **"Chrome Dreams II"** (Reprise), is a puzzle, from its title on down. The original "Chrome Dreams," as Young diehards know, is an unreleased album from 1977 whose songs included "Pocahontas," "Will to Love," "Like a Hurricane," and "Homegrown." This record, ostensibly a sequel—though who releases a sequel to something that was never released in the first place?—is, more accurately, an inverted image. While the songs from the first "Chrome Dreams" were scattered over a series of successive albums, this album includes songs written during disparate time periods, stitched together and brought to life: Young's Frankenstein, you could say.

Young works in many modes—pastoral country, moody folk, lumbering rock—and all of them are represented here. The album opener, "Beautiful Bluebird," is a pretty, mellow ballad with airy harmonies; "Boxcar," the second song, is a darker and riskier meditation on identity. Then comes the record's centerpiece, "Ordinary People." The song is a leftover from the late eighties, when Young was playing with a full horn section and calling his band the Bluenotes. A massive ode to our collective humanity, it runs for nine long verses and more than eighteen minutes: that's three times as long as "Like a Rolling Stone" and longer even than "Sister Ray." It's also a major composition, passing through scenes of hope, justice, ambition, and disappointment as the guitar stings and the horns surge. "Some are saints and some are jerks," Young sings, cataloguing his subjects more specifically as he goes—"alcoholic people," "patch-of-ground people," and even, in a wonderfully perverse refusal to update lyrics, "Lee Iacocca people."

A song as monumental as "Ordinary People" presents a strategic challenge. Where should you put it so that it doesn't swallow up the rest of the album? Not third, as it turns out. Placing it there is like filling out a lineup card where every power hitter on the team bats cleanup, all at once. The songs that follow, "Shining Light" and "The Believer," are mid-tempo soul-flavored ballads that sound like echoes of, or outtakes from, Young's 2002 album "Are You Passionate?" The album regains its footing somewhat with the driving "Spirit Road" and "Dirty Old Man," a portrait of a gnarled curmudgeon who drinks, messes around with the boss's wife, and puts "a bag of frozen peas" on his busted knees, but it can't recover completely. The song that suffers most from the "Ordinary People" hangover is the knotty, compelling "No Hidden Path," which is full of natural imagery and spiritual inquiry and clocks in at a brisk fourteen minutes.

—*Ben Greenman*

REVIVALS, CLASSICS, ETC.

Titles with a dagger are reviewed above.

ANTHOLOGY FILM ARCHIVES
32 Second Ave., at 2nd St. (212-505-5181)—The films of Lionel Rogosin. Oct. 19 at 7:30: "Come Back Africa" (1959) and "An American in Sophiatown" (2007, Earl Lloyd Ross). ♦ Oct. 20 at 5: "On the Bowery" (1956). ♦ Oct. 20 at 6:15: "Good Times, Wonderful Times" (1965), followed by a panel discussion. ♦ "Essential Cinema." Oct. 21 at 6: Short films by Jordan Belson, Bruce Baillie, and Douglass Crockwell. ♦ Oct. 21 at 8: Short films by Stan Brakhage, including "Window Water Baby Moving" (1959).

BAM ROSE CINEMAS
30 Lafayette Ave., Brooklyn (718-636-4100)—"Jonathan Lethem Selects." Oct. 17 at 4:30, 6:50, and 9:15: "La Collectionneuse" (†). ♦ Oct. 22 at 7: "The Lineup" (1958, Don Siegel) and "Murder by Contract" (1958, Irving Lerner). ♦ "Pordenone Silent Film Weekend." Oct. 18 at 7: "The Clown" (1926, A. W. Sandberg). ♦ Oct. 19 at 7: "Treasures from a Chest," film clips selected and presented by Serge Bromberg. ♦ Oct. 20 at 4:30: "The Hill Park Mystery" (1923, Sandberg). ♦ Oct. 20 at 7:30: "Atlantis" (1913, August Blom). ♦ Oct. 21 at 4: "The End of the World" (†). ♦ Oct. 21 at 6: "The Sky Ship" (1918, Holger-Madsen) and short films from First World War battlefields. ♦ "Brooklyn Close-Up." Oct. 23 at 4:30, 6:50, and 9:30: "The Big Bad Swim" (2006, Ishai Setton). The 6:50 screening will be followed by a Q. & A. with the director and members of the cast and crew.

FILM FORUM
W. Houston St. west of Sixth Ave. (212-727-8110)—In revival. Oct. 17-18 at 1:30, 3:30, 5:30, 7:30, and 9:30: "La Chinoise" (1967, Jean-Luc Godard; in French). ♦ Oct. 19-Nov. 1 (call for showtimes): "War and Peace" (1968, Sergei Bondarchuk; in Russian). The 7 P.M. screening on Oct. 19 will be introduced by the translators Richard Pevear and Larissa Volokhonsky.

FRENCH INSTITUTE ALLIANCE FRANÇAISE
Florence Gould Hall, 55 E. 59th St. (212-355-6160)—Through Oct. 30: "Alexandre Desplat: A Visionary Composer." Oct. 23 at 12:30, 4, and 7: "The Queen" (2006, Stephen Frears).

IFC CENTER
323 Sixth Ave., at W. 3rd St. (212-924-7771)—"Stranger Than Fiction," a documentary series. Oct. 16 at 7:30: "Cat Dancers" (2007, Harris Fishman).

MUSEUM OF MODERN ART
Roy and Niuta Titus Theatres, 11 W. 53rd St. (212-708-9480)—"Still Moving," films from the museum's collections. Oct. 17 at 2: "Contempt" (1963, Jean-Luc Godard; in French, English, German, and Italian). ♦ Oct. 17 at 8:30: "Hands Up!" (1926, Clarence Badger; silent). ♦ Through Nov. 5: "Spain (Un)Censored." All films are in Spanish. Oct. 17 at 6: "Death of a Cyclist" (1955, Juan Antonio Bardem). ♦ Oct. 17 at 8:15 and Oct. 20 at 4:30: "Welcome Mister Marshall!" (1952, Luis García Berlanga). ♦ Oct. 18 at 6: "The Little Flat" (1958, Marco Ferreri). ♦ Oct. 18 at 8:30: "Plácido" (1961, Berlanga). ♦ Oct. 19 at 6: "Nine Letters to Bertha" (1965, Basilio Martín Patino), followed by a discussion with the director. ♦ Oct. 19 at 8:30: "Songs for After a War" (1971, Patino), followed by a discussion with the director. ♦ Oct. 20 at 2: "Aunt Tula" (1964, Miguel Picazo). ♦ Oct. 20 at 7: "The Executioner" (1963, Berlanga), introduced by the actor Rafael Azcona. ♦ Oct. 21 at 2:30: "My Dearest Señorita" (1971, Jaime de Armiñán). ♦ Oct. 21 at 5:30: "The Spirit of the Beehive" (1973, Victor Erice). ♦ Oct. 22 at 6: "Poachers" (1975, José Luis Borau). ♦ Oct. 22 at 8:15: "The Disenchantment" (1975, Jaime Chávarri). ♦ Special screenings. Oct. 18 at 6:15 and 8:30: "Slipstream" (2007, Anthony Hopkins), introduced by the director. ♦ "Film on Film." Oct. 19 at 8:30 and Oct. 21 at 2: "Correction Please, or How We Got Into Pictures" (1979, Noel Burch) and "The Making of a Movie" (1957, Tom Ryan). ♦ Oct. 20 at 2: "The Language of the Silent Cinema" (1973, compiled by Vlada Petric). ♦ Oct. 20 at 5:30: Short films, including "You Only Live Once: Production Takes from a Film in the Making" (1937, Fritz Lang). ♦ Oct. 21 at 4: "Louisiana Story Study Film" (1962, George Amberg).

MUSEUM OF THE MOVING IMAGE
35th Ave. at 36th St., Astoria (718-784-0077)—Through Nov. 11: The films of Andy Warhol. Oct. 20 at 2: "Haircut #1" (1963) and "Kiss" (1963). ♦ Oct. 20 at 4: "Harlot" (1964) and "Couch" (1964). ♦ Oct. 20 at 6:30: "Blow Job" (1964) and "Tarzan and Jane Regained, Sort Of . . ." (1963). ♦ Oct. 21 at 2: "Screen Tests: Reel 16" (1963), "Sleep" (1963), and "Soap Opera" (1964). ♦ Oct. 21 at 5: A panel discussion with the curator Callie Angell and the critic Amy Taubin. ♦ Oct. 21 at 7: "Eat" (1964) and "Screen Test #2: 1965" (1965).

RUBIN MUSEUM OF ART
150 W. 17th St. (212-620-5000)—"Cabaret Cinema." Oct. 19 at 9:30: "A Canterbury Tale" (1944, Michael Powell and Emeric Pressburger), introduced by Powell's widow, the editor Thelma Schoonmaker.

SCANDINAVIA HOUSE
58 Park Ave., at 38th St. (212-847-9779)—Through Dec. 15: "A Celebration of Danish Cinema: Nordisk Film at 100." Oct. 17 at 6:30 and Oct. 20 at 3: "The Vicar of Vejlby" (1931, George Schnéevoigt; in Danish).

THALIA THEATRE
Symphony Space, Broadway at 95th St. (212-864-5400)—"John Sayles's Personal Choice." Oct. 21 at 7:30: "Taking Off" (1971, Milos Forman). ♦ Oct. 23 at 7:30: "The Third Man" (1949, Carol Reed).

WALTER READE THEATRE
Lincoln Center (212-875-5600)—"Recent Hong Kong Cinema." Oct 17 at 2 and 9:15: "Happy Together" (1997, Wong Kar-Wai; in Cantonese). ♦ Oct. 17 at 4 and Oct. 20 at 2: "The Mission" (1999, Johnnie To; in Cantonese). ♦ Oct. 17 at 6:30 and Oct. 19 at 6: "Triangle" (2007, Tsui Hark, Ringo Lam, and To; in Cantonese). ♦ Oct. 18 at 1:30: "Going Home" (2002, Peter Chan; in Cantonese). ♦ Oct. 18 at 9, Oct. 20 at 6:15, and Oct. 23 at 3:15: "Confession of Pain" (2006, Andrew Lau and Alan Mak; in Mandarin, Cantonese, and English). ♦ Oct. 19 at 1:30 and Oct. 21 at 6:15: "2046" (2004, Wong; in Cantonese, Japanese, and Mandarin). ♦ Oct. 19 at 4 and 8: "Infernal Affairs" (2002, Lau and Mak; in Cantonese, English, and Thai). ♦ Oct. 20 at 4: "Ming Ming" (2006, Susie Au; in Cantonese and Mandarin). ♦ Oct. 20 at 8:30 and Oct. 23 at 1: "One Night in Mongkok" (2004, Derek Yee; in Cantonese and Mandarin). ♦ Oct. 21 at 2: "Election" (2005, To; in Cantonese, Mandarin, and English). ♦ Oct. 21 at 4:15: "Triad Election" (2006, To; in Mandarin and Cantonese). ♦ Oct. 21 at 8:50: "Initial D" (2005, Lau and Mak; in English and Cantonese).

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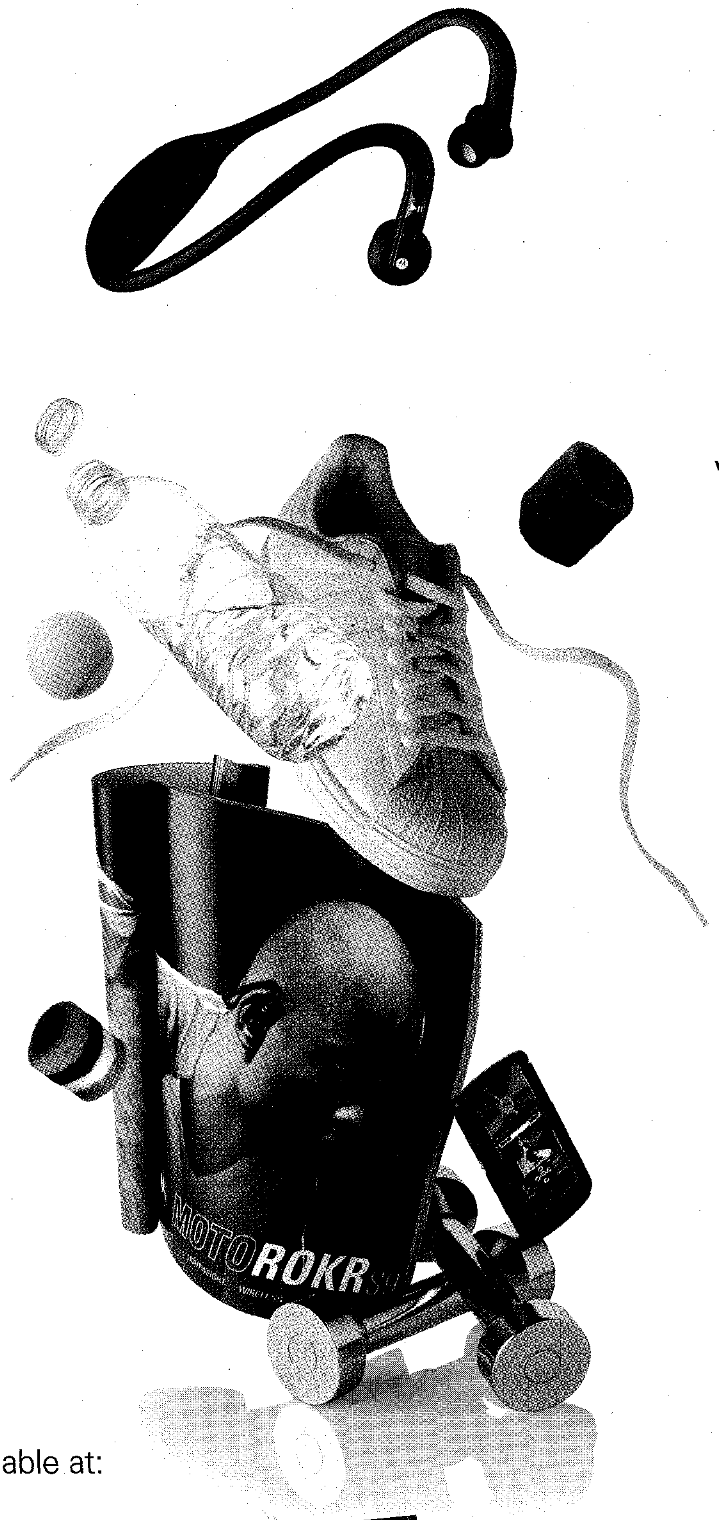

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READINGS AND TALKS

POETS HOUSE
The "Against All Odds" program is a two-day look at the current state of Chinese poetry. It starts on Oct. 16 at 7, with a discussion by Cao Shuying, Cris Mattison, Eleni Sikelianos, Sun Yi, and Zhang Er. The next evening, also at 7, features readings by Cao, Mattison, Sun, and Zhang, as well as by Martine Bellen, Charles Borkhuis, Caroline Crumpacker, Joseph Donahue, John High, Bob Holman, Charles Laughlin, Ma Lan, Rachel Levitsky, Leonard Schwartz, and Zhang Zhen. (72 Spring St., 2nd fl. 212-431-7920.)

TOM PERROTTA
The author of "Little Children" reads from his new novel, "The Abstinence Teacher." (Barnes & Noble, Broadway at 66th St. No tickets necessary. Oct. 17 at 7:30.)

92ND STREET Y
Oct. 17 at 8: The economist and *Times* columnist Paul Krugman discusses his new book, "The Conscience of a Liberal," with the radio host Leonard Lopate. Oct. 23 at 8: The late-night comedian Stephen Colbert offers selections from his look at what ails the country, "I Am America (And So Can You!)." (Lexington Ave. at 92nd St. 212-415-500.)

TIPA PROJECT READING
TIPA, which stands for Toward International Peace Through the Arts and is the creation of the marketer turned activist Stan Tannen, presents "World Poetry for World Peace," a program of readings from the three-volume international-poetry collection "Poem a Day." The actors Marian Seldes and Frances Sternhagen will join the guest of honor, Alice Quinn, the executive director of the Poetry Society of America, who is stepping down, after twenty years, from her other post, as poetry editor of this magazine. (St. Peter's Church, Lexington Ave. at 54th St. For more information, call 212-935-2200. Oct. 19 at 12:30.)

"REVELATION READINGS"
The play-reading series presented by the Red Bull Theatre continues with "Tallgrass Gothic." This adaptation of the Jacobean drama "The Changeling" was written by Melanie Marnich and transplants the action to rural Minnesota. The reading features Michael Cerveris and Michael Chernus. (Playwrights Horizons, 416 W. 42nd St. 212-279-4200. Oct. 22 at 7.)

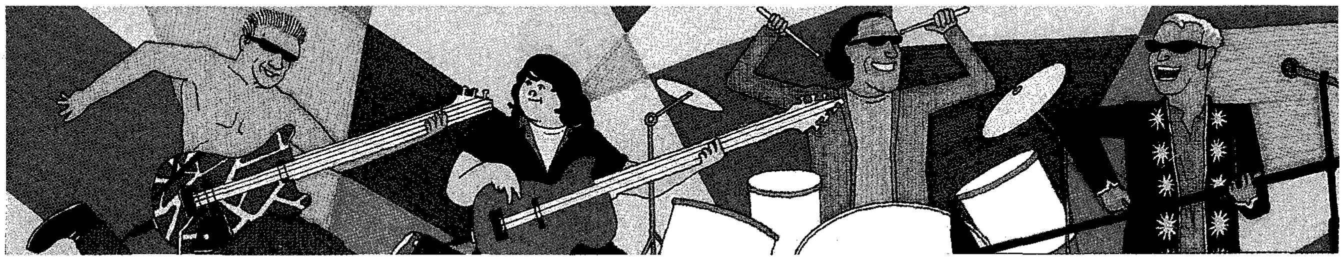
"READING BETWEEN A & B"
The poets Philip Levine, Dorianne Laux, and Maurice Manning read from their work at the Eleventh Street Bar, in the East Village. (510 E. 11th St. No tickets necessary. Oct. 22 at 7:30.)

ABOVE AND BEYOND

BIG ONION WALKING TOURS
Two decades ago this week, Mike Tyson successfully defended his heavyweight-championship title, Billy Martin was named the manager of the Yankees (for the fifth, and final, time), and the Dow Jones Industrial Average lost nearly a quarter of its value in a single day, Oct. 19. In honor of the twentieth anniversary of Black Monday, the veteran tour guides Beth Pillsbury and Erik Goldner lead a not-so-random walk down Wall Street, discussing the legacy of that crash and of the one a few generations earlier, in 1929. (212-439-1090. Oct. 19 at 11 A.M.)

"THALIA FOLLIES"
Symphony Space's political-cabaret series returns for the season, with a night of songs, sketches, and poetry devoted to the seemingly never-ending Presidential race. (Broadway at 95th St. 212-864-5400. Oct. 22 at 6:30 and 8:30.)

AUCTIONS AND ANTIQUES
The first of two intriguing sales of photographs at **Christie's**, on Oct. 17, is made up of mostly American street scenes (with a large selection of works by Robert Frank and a significant number by Walker Evans) from a private collection; the other is a selection of portraits of artists (Picasso and Arbus, among others) by such greats as Penn, Winogrand, and Avedon. A more general auction of photographs takes place the next day (Oct. 18), followed by two sales of European decorative art (Oct. 19), leading off with the New York edition of the massive three-city auction of objets d'art and furniture from the collection of the French *antiquaire* Bernard Steinitz. (20 Rockefeller Plaza, at 49th St. 212-636-2000.) ♦ Armchair adventurers with healthy bank accounts can buy their way to hidden treasure at **Sotheby's** jewelry sale this week (Oct. 17) by bidding for one of six jewel-encrusted insects that were once part of the treasure hunt inspired by Michael Stadther's picture book "A Treasure's Trove." (Six of the successful sleuths are now cashing in their prizes.) Deluxe watches go on sale on Oct. 19. (York Ave. at 72nd St. 212-606-7000.) ♦ **Phillips** presents a sale of photographs, on Oct. 17, featuring such early works as F. Holland Day's 1906 self-portrait as a sultry Pontius Pilate as well as more up-to-date selections by Arbus, Sherman, and Sugimoto. Jewelry lovers get an opportunity to drool over the house's selling exhibit of sensuous pieces by the French designer Frédéric Zaavy (Oct. 22-Nov. 2). (450 W. 15th St. 212-940-1200.)



JIM STOTEN

ON THE HORIZON

CLASSICAL MUSIC
LIGHTING UP
Nov. 2-18

"Berlin in Lights," Carnegie Hall's sprawling celebration of the German metropolis, will feature several classical events, including concerts by Simon Rattle and the Berlin Philharmonic. (212-247-7800.)

MOVIES
THEY ARE BERLINERS
Nov. 2-18

In conjunction with Carnegie Hall's "Berlin in Lights" series, MOMA hosts a survey of new German cinema that includes a documentary about Ernst Lubitsch's pre-Hollywood career in Berlin and another, "A Father's Music," about the double life of the conductor Otmar Suitner. Other events include P.S. 1's continuous screening of Fassbinder's "Berlin Alexanderplatz." (212-708-9480.)

ART
LIQUID ASSET
Nov. 3-May 26, 2008

The American Museum of Natural History's "Water: H_2O=Life" explores the cultural, scientific, biological, and ecological dimensions of the planet's central natural resource, using images projected onto a curtain of steam, dioramas, displays of live animals, and various artifacts from the museum's collection. (212-769-5100.)

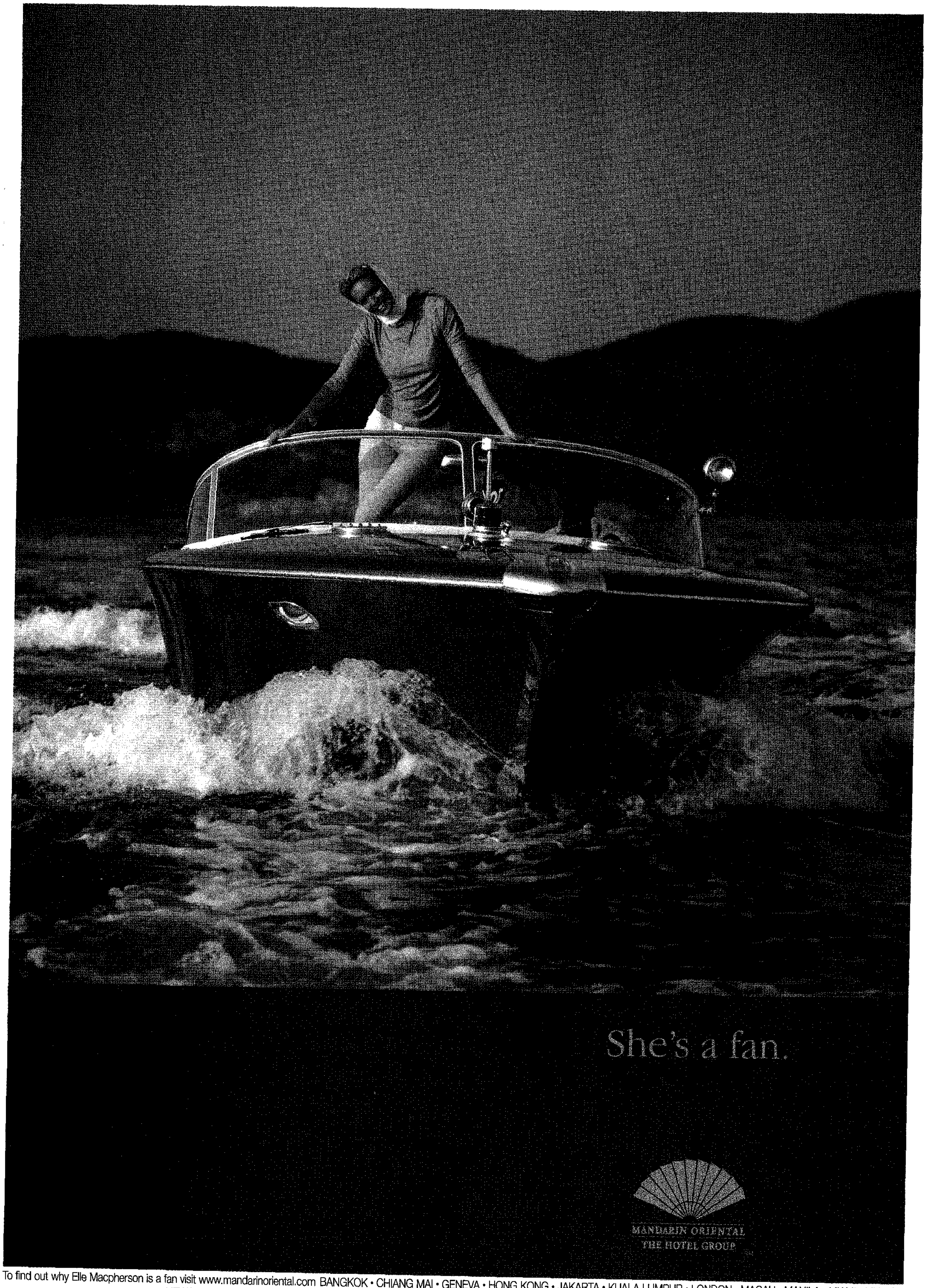
THE THEATRE
OLD IS NEW
Nov. 8

"Is He Dead?" was written by Mark Twain in 1898 but left unpublished until more than a century later. David Ives adapted the comedy, in which an artist fakes his death to improve the value of his paintings. Michael Blakemore directs the Broadway première, at the Lyceum. (212-239-6200.)

NIGHT LIFE
LITTLE GUITARS
Nov. 13

Van Halen is back, in nearly original form, for the first time since David Lee Roth's unceremonious departure from the band, in 1985. The exception to the original lineup is Alex Van Halen's teen-age son, Wolfgang, who has taken Michael Anthony's spot on bass. The band is on a national tour that has fans and critics alike cheering. (212-307-7171.)

Van Halen's reunion tour, with David Lee Roth, at Madison Square Garden.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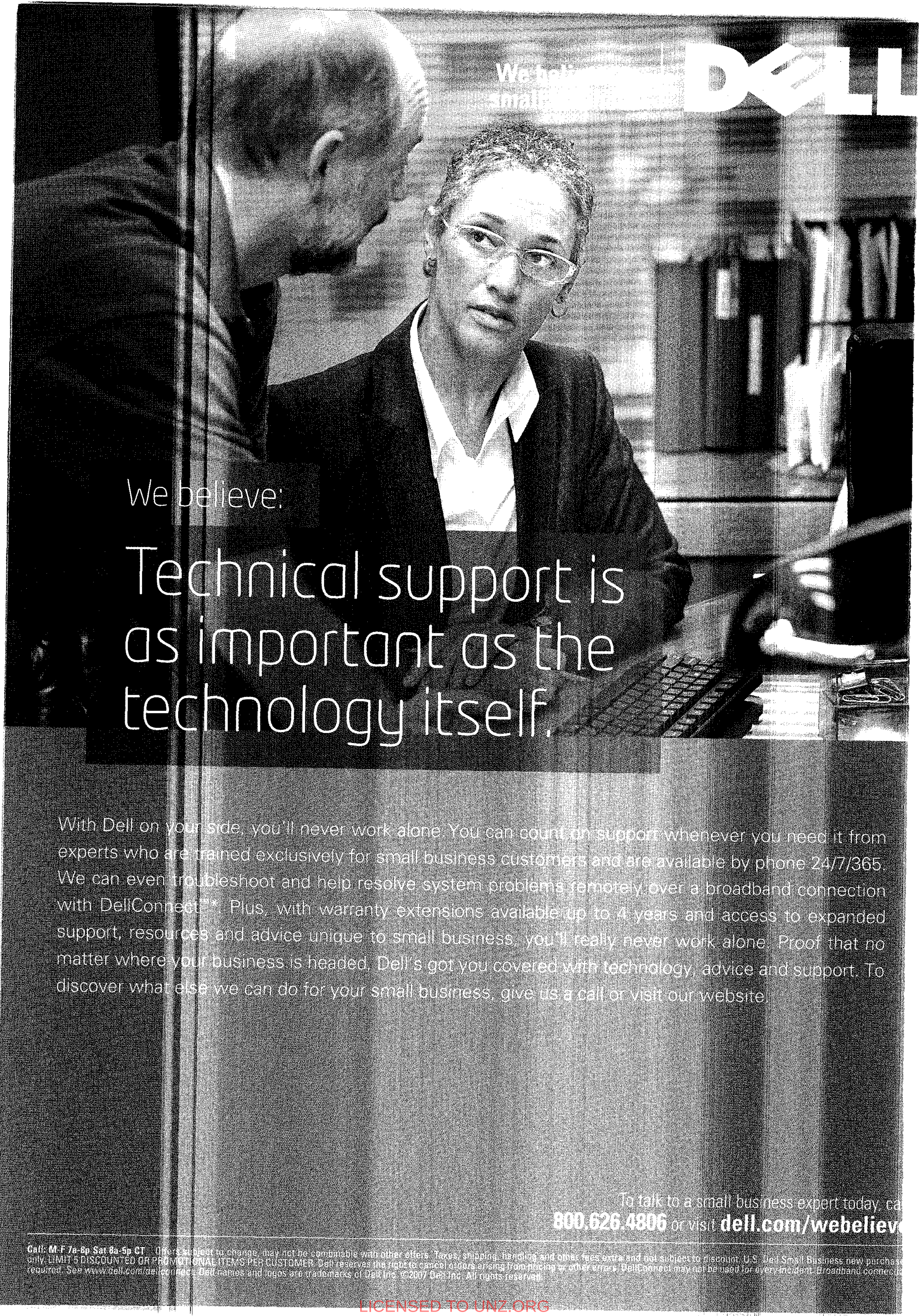

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THE NEW YORKER

THE TALK OF THE TOWN

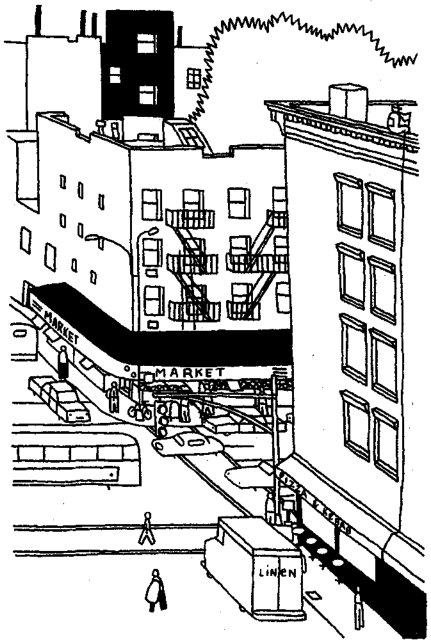
COMMENT
ASK THE IRAQIS

In the upcoming Presidential primaries, Americans will have the chance to choose among candidates who propose immediate withdrawal from Iraq (Richardson), rapid drawdowns (Edwards and Obama), open-ended commitment to the war (Giuliani, Romney, McCain), or a resigned middle ground, notably Hillary Clinton, who acknowledges that the occupation will likely endure well into the next Presidential term no matter which party occupies the White House.

The Iraqi people have no such choice, even though it's their future that is at stake—and even though the creation of a democratic republic, one in which the Iraqis command their own destiny, has been a stated goal of the war. According to President Bush, American troops will leave whenever the Iraqis ask us to. "It's their government's choice," he has said. "If they were to say, leave, we would leave." But while the Iraqi government is divided and uncertain about the presence of occupying forces, the will of the Iraqi people has been clear from the beginning: they want the troops withdrawn.

As early as August of 2003, five months after the invasion, a Zogby poll found that two-thirds of Iraqis wanted the U.S. and British forces to leave the country within a year, and more than half said that the Iraqis should be left alone to set up their own government. Two years later, as Iraqis were about to vote in their first democratic election, two-thirds wanted the Coalition troops out either immediately or as soon as the new government was established. (The model that Iraqis most admired was that of the United Arab Emirates, a loose federation of seven tribal states, each overseen by a prince, and ruled by a president who is, essentially, a king.) In 2006, when the Iraqi government was in place, a poll by the University of Maryland found that seventy-one per cent of Iraqis wanted their government to ask the Americans to leave within a year; an even higher number doubted that the U.S. would comply with the request.

LAURENT CILLUFFO



A poll released last month (by ABC News, the BBC, and the Japanese broadcaster NHK), half a year after the surge in American forces, found that nearly half of Iraqis favored an immediate withdrawal of U.S. forces, while thirty-four per cent of Iraqis, most of them Kurds, said that the U.S. should remain "until security is restored." Among Shiites, forty-four per cent favored immediate withdrawal, and among Sunnis the figure reached seventy-two per cent—substantial increases in both cases. More Iraqis than ever—fifty-seven per cent—say that violence against American forces is acceptable, diminishing the prospect of order being restored as long as the occupation continues.

One might assume that if American forces could make the country more secure, Iraqis would feel better disposed toward the U.S. presence. Apparently not. American military leaders say that the surge has reduced sectarian attacks to their lowest level in more than a year, and yet the number of Iraqis wanting the U.S. to withdraw has risen by twelve per cent over the same period of time. Anbar Province, which President Bush recently visited because the surge had its greatest success there, has the highest concentration of those saying America should leave immediately.

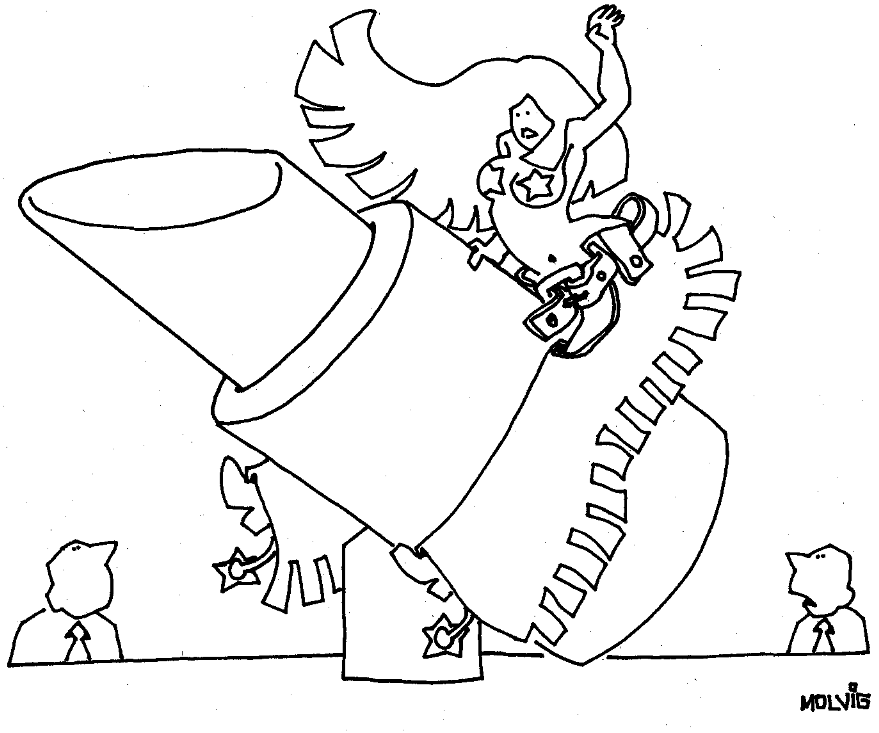
The Iraqi government has a far more ambivalent view of the occupation than its people do. Inside the Green Zone, Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki and a restive Council of Representatives have been struggling to respond to the sentiments of their constituents while not actually asking the Americans to leave. In June, the demagogic militia leader Moqtada al-Sadr, who heads one of the most powerful Shiite parties in the country, sponsored a resolution requiring the government to seek permission of the parliament before asking the U.N. to reauthorize the presence of foreign forces in Iraq. The resolution passed, gathering support even from Sunni lawmakers, including Mahmoud al-Mashhadani, then speaker of the parliament, who had previously called for the Americans to stay in the country for as long as a decade, or until "they have corrected what they have done." Yet even Sadr was pressing not for an immediate pullout but, rather, for an unspecified "timeline" for withdrawal.

The ambivalence among the Iraqi lawmakers doesn't mean that they are out of step with the Iraqi people. Although the surveys suggest that they would overwhelmingly ask us to leave, countless anecdotal reports suggest that Iraqis are woefully aware of the dangers that could ensue. "If the Americans leave right now, there is going to be a massacre in Iraq," a twenty-seven-year-old music student told the Washington *Post* last year, in a typical comment. "But if they don't leave, there will be more problems." "There will be lakes of blood," another young man said. "Of course we want the Americans to leave, but if they do, it will be a great disaster for us."

Beyond the risks of sectarian slaughter, there's the prospect that other countries in the region will be quick to assert their influence, further weakening Iraqi self-governance. Kurds and Shiites in the oil regions will strain to pull the country apart. Yet the presence of American troops is itself a goad to insurgency, and an impediment to the creation of legitimate civil authority. As long as we remain in Iraq, the Iraqi people will feel themselves to be subjugated by a foreign power. If the Iraqis were to go to the polls, dip their fingers in the purple ink, and actually choose whether or not to allow the Americans to remain, they would have to reconcile their loathing for the occupation with their dread of what might happen without it.

As the Republican and Democratic Presidential contenders debate whether we should leave now, or soon, or years from now, they should remember that it's not just an American decision. We didn't ask the Iraqis if we could invade their country; we didn't ask them if we could occupy it; and now we are not asking them if we should leave. Whatever we end up doing, we need to remember that eventually the only people who are going to occupy Iraq are the Iraqis, and that the decision of when we leave, as inevitably we will, should be as much theirs as ours.

—*Lawrence Wright*



"I don't know much about art, but I know what I like."

GUMSHOE DEPT.
ONE MAN'S WALLPAPER

The art world, we keep hearing, is in a fine mess, awash in money and bereft of direction, and a recent documentary, "Who the #$&% Is Jackson Pollock?," seems to prove the point. In it, a retired truck driver in California named Teri Horton buys what she considers to be an ugly painting as a gag gift for five dollars at a thrift store, is later told that it looks like a Jackson Pollock (the title refers to her initial reaction), and then struggles to convince anyone who matters that it could be the real thing. The film pits old-fashioned art authenticators (Thomas Hoving, the former Met director, runs his fingers over the painting before declaring, "It's dead on arrival") against a forensic scientist in Montreal, Peter Paul Biro, who finds what he believes to be Pollock's paint-stained fingerprints on the back of the canvas. Horton says she has turned down an offer of nine million dollars for the painting from a Saudi collector.

The other day, at Cipriani Dolci, in New York, Kevin Jamison, a graduate student in government and politics at St. John's, and the co-founder of a fledgling art consultancy, flipped through a copy of Ellen Landau's "Jackson Pollock," comparing the reprints in the book with a pair of images stored on his iPhone. These were of paintings he'd bought, for twenty-five dollars apiece, at an antique shop in Norfolk, Virginia, this summer, and they looked, to an untrained eye, like plausible Pollocks, at least in the sense that they were abstract and drippy. "They were under a stack of paintings about this tall," Jamison, who has a baby face masked by stubble, said, pointing at the tabletop. One is seventeen inches by twenty-one inches, and painted on rice paper, using only white and gray. The other is twenty-six by twenty-six, on canvas, and much more colorful: green, yellow, red, white, and black.

Jamison watched "Who the #$&% Is Jackson Pollock?" upon returning from Virginia, and then set about finding

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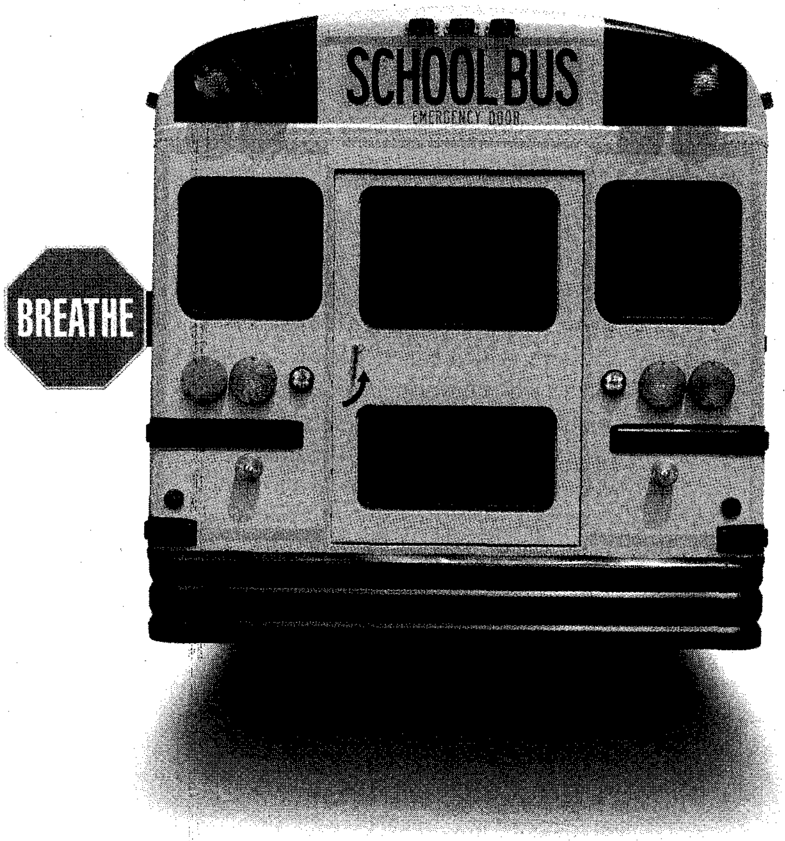

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what he hoped could be useful forensic details, which he also showed on his iPhone: a flake of gold paint, visible only under magnification (Pollock used gold spray paint in his studio); rusty vintage staples; and a peculiar screwlike indentation that he found on the left side of the larger painting, which he believes could match a similar mark that he spotted in Pollock's "One: Number 31, 1950," at MOMA. (A caveat: referring to the painting's left side "depends on what someone considers the top or the bottom," Jamison said. "I've been looking at it for a couple of months and hanging it different ways.")

"As of now, what they're worth is what I paid for them," Jamison said. But Peter Paul Biro, the forensic expert, has agreed to examine the paintings in person early next month, and Jamison has also corresponded with Richard Taylor, a professor of physics at the University of Oregon, who examined fractal patterns in some of the contested Herbert Matter Pollocks (two dozen paintings discovered in a Long Island locker) currently on exhibit at Boston College's McMullen Museum of Art.

Before forensics, the standard process of authentication involved establishing provenance. The provenance of Jamison's putative Pollocks is as follows: Lana Wolcott, the proprietor of the Antique Design Center, in Norfolk, bought them at a sheriff's auction, a few years ago, as part of the foreclosed-on belongings of Joseph Michaud, a "wild and unfettered art dealer" from the area, she said, who has since died. "He was the kind of guy that would think he saw a Picasso in a paper bag," she said. One such would-be Picasso hangs in her den: "It's a wonderful painting of women who are sitting with their breasts exposed and platters of fish in front of them."

Michaud, according to an associate of Wolcott's named John Mortensen, had decorated an entire room and hallway of his house with Pollock-style works, "almost like wallpapering." There were twenty or thirty of them in all. "I don't know where Joe found these, but he never had a lot of money, so he didn't pay very much for 'em," Mortensen said.

Wolcott, in any event, saw the paintings as "very contemporary, very fun, but nothing that I'd ever hang in my own house," and dumped them in the back of her store, which is better known for its nineteenth-century chandeliers than for Abstract Expressionism. Jamison had been visiting her shop semi-regularly for years before seizing on the possible Pollocks. "He sees delusions of grandeur at every corner," Wolcott said. "And that's a very good, useful thing to have. He's not jaded yet."

—*Ben McGrath*

THE BOARDS
YOU SAY POTATO

N'est-ce pas?
Nicht wahr?

"The science of speech. That's my profession. . . . I can place any man within six miles." That's Henry Higgins, in Act I of "Pygmalion," about to transform a lowly flower girl into a proper Edwardian lady. If you are a Manhattan-born starlet making your Broadway début as said flower girl, he is precisely the sort of man you don't want in your audience. In a play about upwardly mobile speech, the accents have to be right: you don't want to wind up sounding like Dick Van Dyke in "Mary Poppins." And so a real-life Higgins is called for, in this case—the Roundabout's revival of "Pygmalion," soon to open at the American Airlines Theatre—Majella Hurley, an English dialect coach who was brought in to help Claire Danes, as Eliza Doolittle, perfect her "not bloody likely"s and "How do you *doooo*?"s.

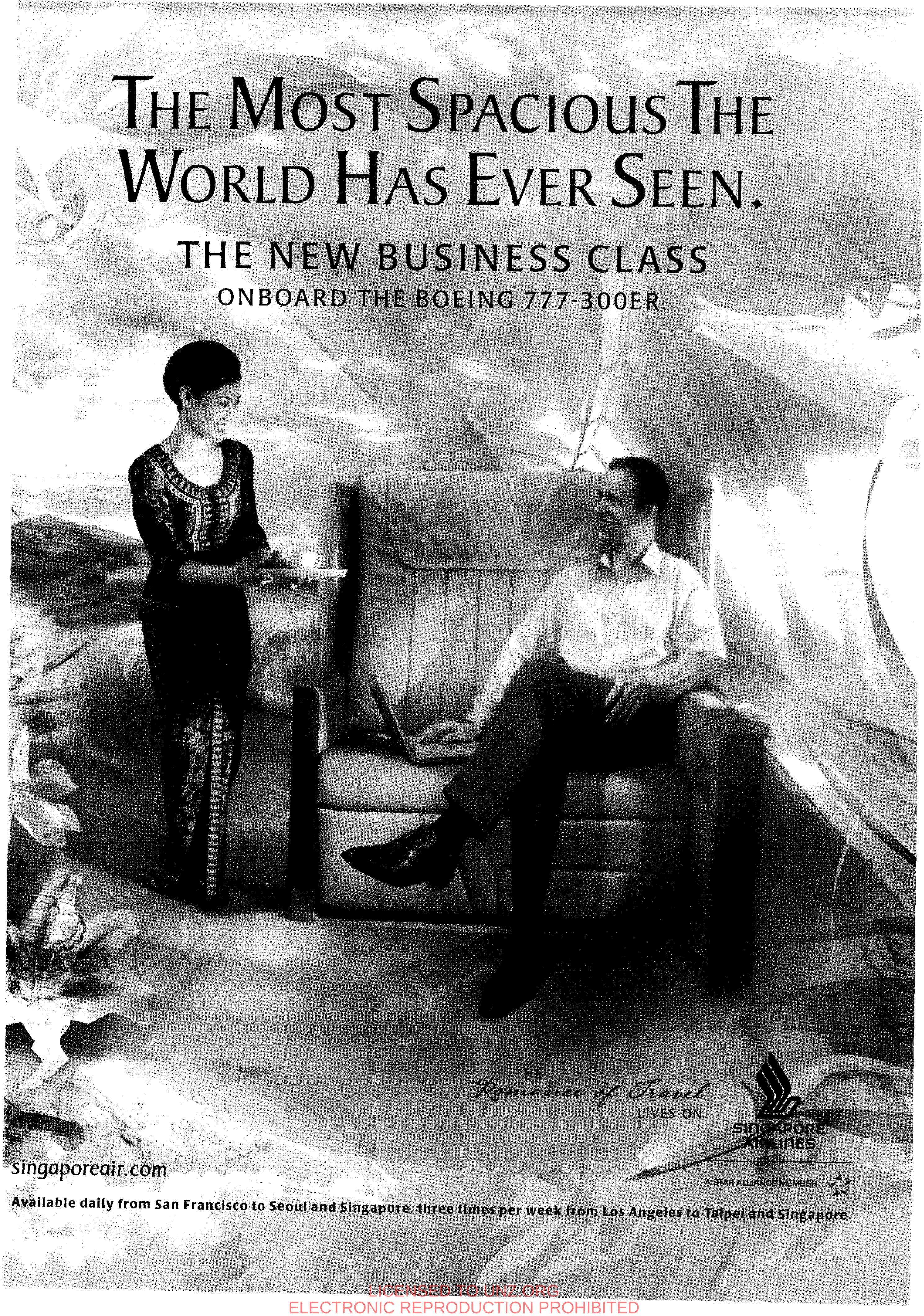
"The whole thing about an accent is that it's physical as well as cerebral," Hurley said last Wednesday, during a post-matinée conversation. "It has to sit within the body." Hurley, who was born in Ireland but sounds like a Londoner, began working with Danes on Eliza's Cockney accent in July. "You've got to be as authentic as you can and true to the period, but you also have to be able to understand what she's saying," Hurley said. "Eliza makes her living selling flowers. She's used to calling out across the cobblestones. You have to make sure it isn't a series of screeches."

Jefferson Mays, who plays Higgins, joined the conversation and offered that one of his biggest hurdles was remembering which syllables to stress: "Logic dictated to me that it would be *Kentish* Town. But it's Kentish *Town*." Hurley had suggested he play archival recordings from the period. "She gave me Danny Jones—the real Professor Higgins. Baden-Powell. Prime Minister Asquith. All these wonderful Edwardian voices," he said. Danes, meanwhile, took a more musical approach, singing through her lines and studying recordings of the turn-of-the-century music-hall star Marie Lloyd.

The drawback in using archival material as a guide was that not every old Brit was consistent in his accent. Mays noticed, for example, that Arthur Conan Doyle waffled between "ask" and "ahsk." He said, "Everybody betrays themselves, in a way that Higgins would pick up immediately and say, 'Ah, he comes from Selsey!' "

Which brought to mind a certain Illinois-born Democratic front-runner who has been accused of affecting a Southern twang. Or a Republican candidate who might, in a general election, try to soften his Brooklyn bark. After all, a modern-day Henry Higgins would probably be employed as a media consultant for a Presidential campaign, where the speech trajectory tends to run in the opposite direction of Eliza's, from Ivy League élite to down-home folksy. Hurley's colleague Beth McGuire, who also attended the matinée—she is the dialect

TOM BACHTELL



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coach for another of the Roundabout's fall shows, "The Overwhelming," a drama, set in Rwanda, that involves seven different dialects—suggested that Senator Hillary Clinton work on her melodiousness. "Any woman in a position of authority tends to lower her pitch," she said. "But Hillary doesn't vary her range a lot. She ends all her sentences on a down glide, which can make her sound masculine and hard."

As for Clinton's meandering accent, Hurley suspected that its mutability was the by-product of a well-travelled life, rather than an attempt at verbal triangulating. "People have become real melting pots," she said, pointing out that Tony Blair had a similar tendency to pick up local inflections depending on the audience.

But regional affiliations, intentional or not, still tend to stick to the tongues of candidates. McGuire, who had listened to some of the previous night's Republican debate, had noticed a striking disparity—aside from the one in economic policy—between Giuliani and his most formidable Republican opponent. "I'm used to listening to Giuliani. He was my mayor," she said. "So here I am listening to Giuliani going *dadadadada*"—she made a machine-gun sound—"and then here's Mitt Romney with this whole other pattern: *dah . . . dah . . . dah . . .* But Giuliani is who Giuliani is, and how we speak is who we are. Giuliani is a *dadadadada* guy."

"This may be a naïve thing to say, but I would hope that people actually listen to content," said Hurley, voicing a sentiment that is not bloody likely.

—*Michael Schulman*

DEPT. OF HOOPLA
HAVING ONE FOR CHE

The fortieth anniversary of Che Guevara's death went by quietly last week, unless you count a party at the Brecht Forum, in the West Village, where a skirmish erupted between the organizers over mojito pricing. Colin Robinson, a Brecht Forum board member and an editor at Scribner, found himself on the losing side of a philosophical rift. "I told them, 'When we sell the drinks, let's sell them at decent prices, so we break even,' " said Robinson, who, in 1995, published Che Guevara's "Motorcycle Diaries" and will publish Fidel Castro's dictated autobiography this December. "They said, 'But people can't afford decent prices!' So we ended up just giving away the mojitos for free and asking for donations."

The party—billed on the invitation as "The political event of the season! An evening of art, music, film, and revolution!"—was meant to attract a more age-diverse crowd than the typical weeknight at the Brecht Forum (upcoming: New Strategies for Today's Labor). "I think the spirit of young people connects to Che," Robinson said. "Even if it's just an image on a T-shirt." Guests ate cheese cubes and browsed among tchotchkes for sale. "These shirts are one-of-a-kind right now," said a representative from a political prisoners' group, pointing to a line of clothing called Panther S'port—athletic jerseys imprinted with the names of imprisoned Black Panthers ("Bobby Seale 66"). He thumbed through the Che offerings: a seventy-five-dollar sweatshirt with a Chanel-like interlocking "C" and "G," a Che polo shirt, and a thirty-five-dollar T-shirt that tweaked the Starbucks logo: "Careful, Che's message you're about to enjoy is extremely hot!" "The idea is to put more marketable things out there—things that people recognize—and to politicize them," he said.

A group from the newly revived Students for a Democratic Society was outside, smoking. "They have a lot of stuff that seems pretty nice," one said. "We go to everyone's events and they come to all of ours. Our organization's not hierarchical." He'd passed on the merchandise. "I already own a Che shirt."

At seven-thirty, the partygoers gathered in an auditorium to hear from the new guard of Che admirers, including Chesa Boudin, the twenty-seven-year-old son of Kathy Boudin, who was jailed after serving as an accomplice in the 1981 Brink's robbery. Boudin, a Rhodes scholar, author, and political consultant, had a neat, buzzed haircut and wore a pink lattice-patterned shirt and gray pants. He said that he had to make a 6:30 A.M. flight to Caracas ("I was in twenty-six countries last year"), and he spoke to the crowd about Che's legacy: "Most of us don't remember when he was killed. But all of us have seen Che Guevara T-shirts." Soon, the floor passed to Tariq Ali, the sixty-four-year-old Pakistani writer and activist, who spoke about a trip he made to Bolivia during the week that Che died there; he had been sent to find the French philosopher Régis Debray, who had been arrested and tortured by the Bolivian government for working with Che.

"One day, some troops picked me up and said, 'The general said you should show us your watch,' " Ali recalled. "They looked at the watch, and they arrested me and locked me up in a room. I said, 'What's going on?' And they said, 'Your watch was recognized. You're Che Guevara's bodyguard and your name is Pombo.' I said, 'How do you explain that I don't speak Spanish?' And one of them who spoke English said, 'I know you *do* speak Spanish.' " The crowd laughed. "I was young and foolhardy. I said, 'Look, I'll do a deal. If you torture me all night and as a result of your torture I speak Spanish, I'll be grateful to you for the rest of my life!' That really had them thinking." After a moment, he added, "Just so people won't forget: Che was not a very sentimental guy. He was a hardheaded revolutionary who killed when he had to kill."

An after-party was held up the street at Socialista, the Havana-inspired lounge whose investors include Harvey Weinstein and Sting. Drinks were provided by Christiania vodka—"ironically, the name of an anarchist encampment in Copenhagen," said Doug Henwood, the editor of the *Left Business Observer*, sipping a vodka-and-soda. Word got out among the club's patrons that they were part of a Che Guevara party. "Great," Malcolm Harris, a clothing designer and a former stylist for Madonna, said, as he ate dinner with several friends. "Great movie. Great T-shirt." Harris was wearing a T-shirt with a silk-screened image of Kate Moss on the front. He looked down at Moss's face. "This is the shirt for me," he said. "I don't know. Maybe she's our revolutionary."

—*Lizzie Widdicombe*

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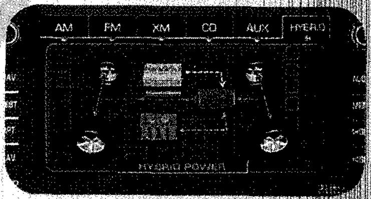

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ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

THE FINANCIAL PAGE

IF YOU CAN MAKE IT HERE

Any discussion about New York City's economic well-being tends to start and end with one phrase: Wall Street. As the Street goes, we assume, so goes the city, which is why politicians will do almost anything to keep the brokerages and investment banks happy. But in a new book called "The Warhol Economy" the social scientist Elizabeth Currid argues that this fixation is misdirected, and that it has led us to neglect the city's most vital and distinctive economic sector: the culture industry, which, in Currid's definition, includes everything from fashion, art, and music to night clubs. In other words, it's SoHo and Chelsea, not Wall Street, that the politicians should really be thinking about.

Of course, everyone knows that art and culture help make New York a great place to live. But Currid goes much further, showing that the culture industry creates tremendous economic value in its own right. It is the city's fourth-largest employer, and generates billions of dollars a year in revenue. More important, New York has no real global rival for dominance in the culture industry. Using an economic-analysis tool called a "location quotient," Currid calculates that New York matters far more to fashion, art, and culture than to finance. To exaggerate a bit, if New York suddenly disappeared, stock markets could keep functioning, but we would not be able to dress ourselves or find art to put on the wall. Currid suggests that, in the fight among cities for business, being the center of fashion and art constitutes New York's true "competitive advantage."

Currid's argument is perhaps overstated—the finance industry, after all, still pays a remarkable twenty per cent of all the wages in the city. But it is true that art and culture are big business, and that New York is more crucial to that business than ever before. The interesting question that Currid's book wrestles with is why. Globalization and the Internet, after all, were supposed to usher in an age in which people could live and work wherever they wanted. So why, more than ever, do people in the culture industry all want to live in New York?

The answer has something to do with the familiar phenomenon that economists call "clustering." It might seem that companies would rather situate themselves far away from their competitors, so that they wouldn't have to worry about having their customers and employees poached. But in practice companies in similar industries often end up clustering together in the same location. The history of American economic innovation in the twentieth century is really a history of clusters—think of movies in Hollywood, cars in Detroit, and technology in Silicon Valley. The traditional explanation is that the costs of being near your competitors are outweighed by the benefits of being near a critical mass of suppliers and customers. But Currid argues that, nowadays, designers and artists cluster in New York for a simpler reason: in these businesses, personal connections are enormously important in determining success or failure. In an idealized view of the fashion and art world, the gatekeepers of taste coolly evaluate the work they see according to Platonic criteria. Currid's conclusion, based on dozens of interviews, is less sublime. "There is very little that gets done in New York that is merit-based," a musician told her. "It boils down to the same maxim: 'It's all who you know.'" And in order to know the right people artists and designers inevitably gravitate to New York, because it's where previous generations of artists and designers, now powerful, gravitated to. The result is a classic case of what economists call network effects: success in the past creates success in the future.

From an aesthetic standpoint, "It's all who you know" may be a grim conclusion, but from the perspective of New York's economy it seems an entirely happy one. So it's odd that Currid ends her book with a warning that New York's current dominance is surprisingly fragile, and that the culture industry may find a new center unless the city takes positive action to protect it. Currid's concerns are familiar ones by now: as the city gets wealthier, it becomes harder for young creative people to live here, and, if they stop coming, the well of creativity will dry up. Her answer is a series of industrial-policy prescriptions, including subsidized rents for artists, more support for things like Fashion Week and the Whitney Biennial, and a more welcoming approach toward night clubs (where, by her account, much of the culture industry's business actually gets done).

Currid's desire to subsidize creativity is understandable, but her insistence that the culture industry is on the verge of crisis is refuted by her own work. Unless you think that network effects in the art-and-culture business are suddenly going to stop mattering, creative people are still going to find ways to make a living here, because they must, in order to succeed. And, empirically, if you look at the history of New York in the twentieth century there is little evidence that a more expensive New York is a less creative New York. To be sure, there was a tremendous artistic efflorescence in the nineteen-seventies, the worst decade of the century for the New York economy. But, in the twenties and the sixties, cultural booms coincided with economic ones, while the explosion in the number of art galleries, bands, and boutiques in the past decade makes it hard to believe that New York is suffering from too little art and culture. It's true that clusters of industry can fade away—think of what happened to Pittsburgh steel. But New York has been a cultural mecca in good times and bad, and until we hear otherwise it seems likely that the pilgrims will just keep coming.

—*James Surowiecki*

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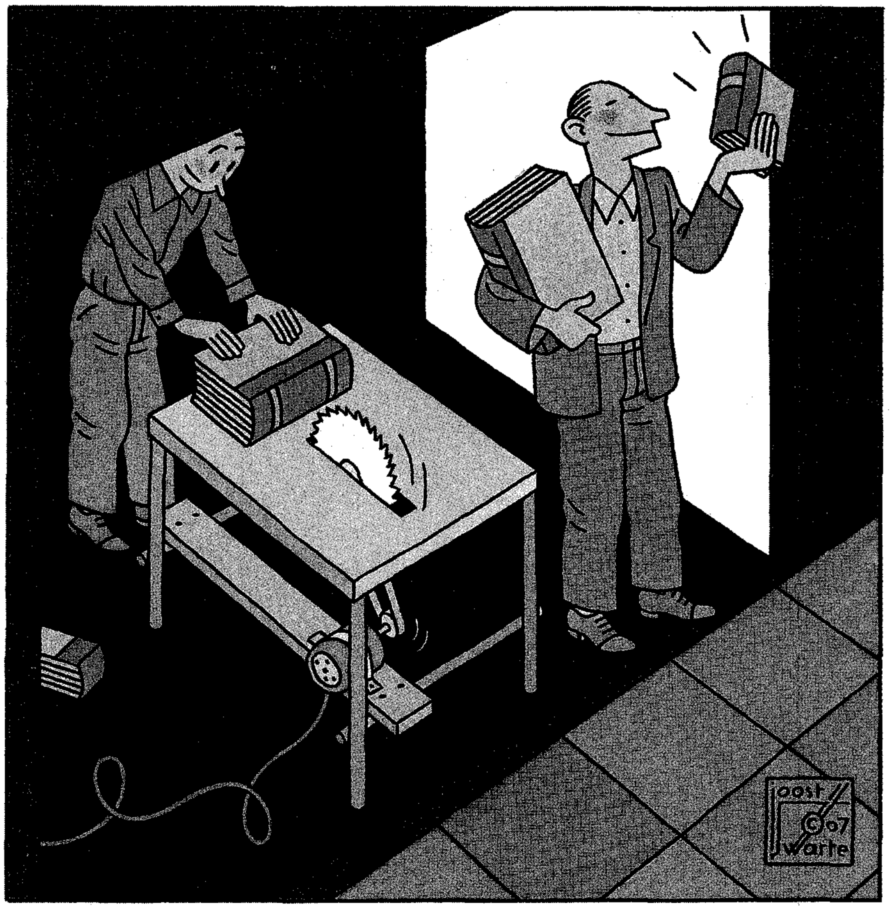
SHELF LIFE

THE CORRECTIONS

Abridgment, enrichment, and the nature of art.

BY ADAM GOPNIK

Our theme today is addition and subtraction, abridgment and expansion, and their effects on works of art and entertainment. (Sorry, what was that? No, the seminar on history of the cinema is in the next classroom.) What can be taken away from a book or a movie, what can be added to it, and what does it tell us about what we bring to both?



A British publisher has issued neatly cut versions of nineteenth-century classics.

The first form to consider is subtraction, or what might more grandly be called the aesthetic of abridgment, as illustrated by a new and ambitious series of "compact editions" produced by the British publisher Orion. "The great classics contain passionate romance, thrilling adventure, arresting characters and unforgettable scenes and situations," an explanatory note tells us. "But finding time to read them can be a problem." So Orion has taken nineteenth-century classics—among them "Moby-Dick," "Anna Karenina," "Vanity Fair," and "The Mill on the Floss"—and cut them neatly in half, like Damien Hirst animals, so that they can be taken in quickly and all the more admired.

Although the tone of the blurbs and the back matter is defiantly unapologetic, the names of the abridgers are mysteriously absent, suggesting that, with the shyness of old-fashioned pornographers, they don't want to be quite so openly associated with the project as their publisher's pride would suggest they ought. Who was the mohel of "Moby-Dick"; who took the vanity out of "Vanity Fair"; who threw Anna under the train a hundred pages sooner than before? Orion isn't telling. Yet the work had to be done with considerable tact and judgment. A good condensation of a hard book is hardly a crime; if Joseph Campbell and Henry Morton Robinson, an editor at *Reader's Digest*, hadn't labored over their "skeleton key" to "Finnegans Wake," readers would still find Joyce's book not just difficult but unapproachable. The Orionites should be proud of their work; their abridgments are skillfully done.

Take "Moby-Dick," a book that, if every reader has not always wanted shorter, then certainly, as Dr. Johnson said about "Paradise Lost," no reader has ever wanted *longer*. The first chapter of the compact edition is typical of the Orion approach. Most of the famous first paragraph, most of the famous first chapter, is presented as Melville wrote it. No muscle is removed—unlike, say, A. L. Rowse's modernization of Shakespeare, no attempt is made to simplify or improve the author's vocabulary and knotty, convoluted syntax. Ishmael asks us to call him so, and the story proceeds.

What is cut in the first chapter is the two long passages that depart from the Ishmaelian specifics: a reflection on people watching boats in Manhattan and the allure of the sea even in a city ("Posted like silent sentinels all around the town, stand thousands upon thousands of mortal men fixed in ocean reveries"), and Melville's invocation of the history of ocean worship ("Why did the old Persians hold the sea holy? Why did the Greeks give it a separate deity?"). These passages are, by modern critical standards, "showy" and "digressive," nervously intent to display stray learning and to make obscure allusion more powerful than inherent emotion. The same thing happens in the subsequent chapters. Melville's story is intact and immediate; it's just that the long bits about the technical details of whaling are gone, as are most of the mock-Shakespearean interludes, the philosophical meanderings, and the metaphysical huffing and puffing. The entire chapter "The Whiteness of the Whale," where Melville tries to explain why white, the natural symbol of Good, is

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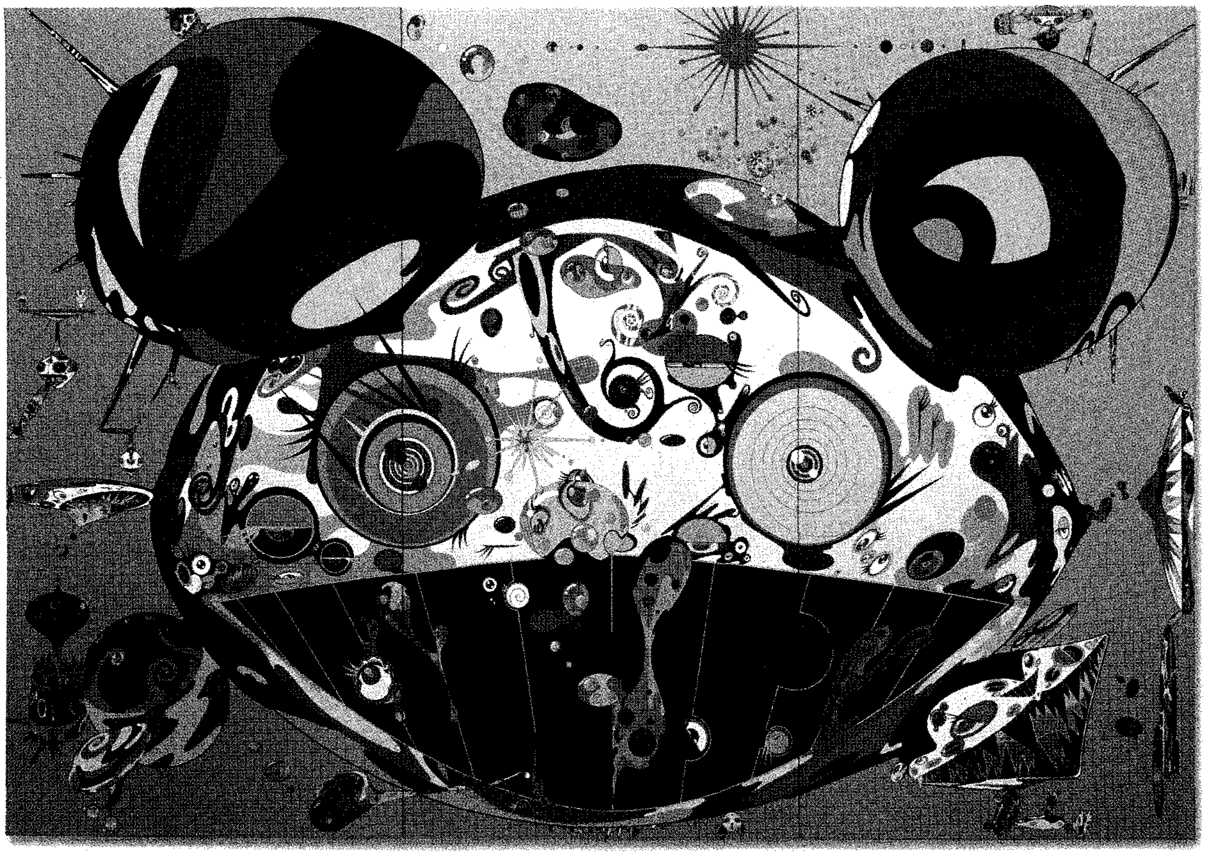

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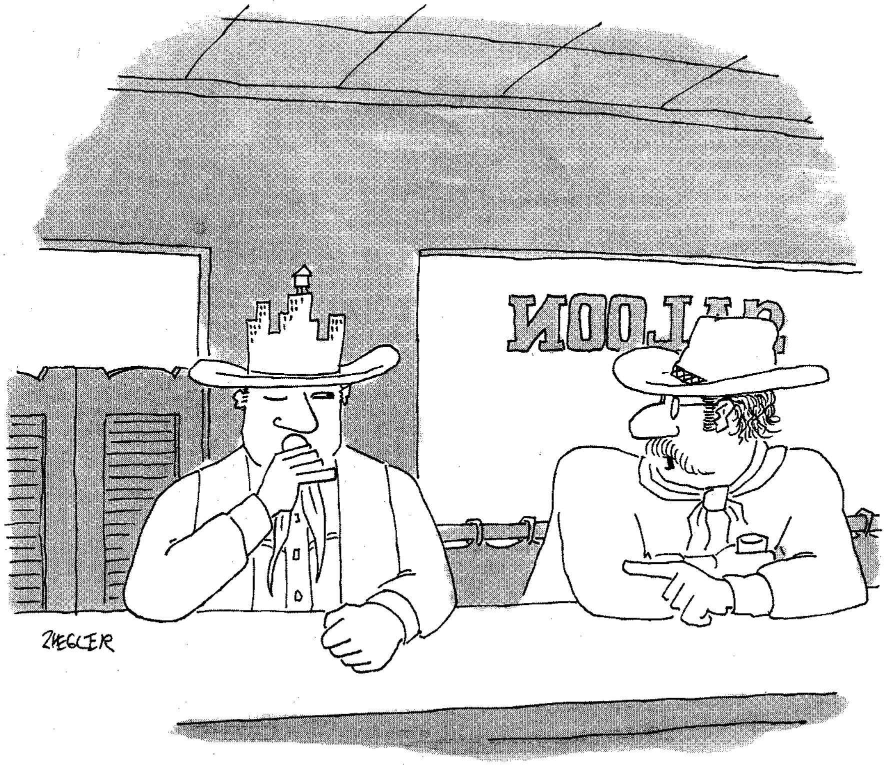


"You ain't from around here, are you, Mister?"

• •

also somehow the natural symbol of Evil, is just, well, whited out.

All abridgments and additions are part of their period; we scoff at the eighteenth century for cutting the tragic end of "Lear" and tacking on a happy one, but the recent, much praised Royal Shakespeare production added a gratuitous Grand Guignol hanging of the poor Fool, on the shaky basis of a sideways reference to his death two acts later. By the same token, the Orion "Moby-Dick" is not defaced; it is, by conventional contemporary standards of good editing and critical judgment, *improved.* The compact edition adheres to a specific idea of what a good novel ought to be: the contemporary aesthetic of the realist psychological novel. This is not what a contemptuous philistine would do with the book. It is what a good editor, of the Maxwell Perkins variety, would do: cut out the self-indulgent stuff and present a clean story, inhabited by plausible characters—the "taut, spare, driving" narrative beloved of Sunday reviewers. You can pretty much read the soothing letter to the author that would have accompanied the suggested cuts, had he been alive to receive it. ("Herman: Just a few small trims along the way; myself I find the whaling stuff fascinating, but I fear your reader wants to move along with the story—and frankly the tensile strength of the narrative is being undercut right now by a lot of stray material that takes us *way* off line. The 'slip' of your research is showing! Here's an idea someone here had the other day: why don't we do a 'readers' guide' where all of this rich, fascinating, miscellaneous whaling material can be made available to people who want it without interfering with the flow of the story?") What the Orion "Moby-Dick" says about the book is what a good critic or professional editor would say about the book. It's what they *did* say: there's too much digression and sticky stuff and extraneous learning. If he'd cut that out, it would be a better story.

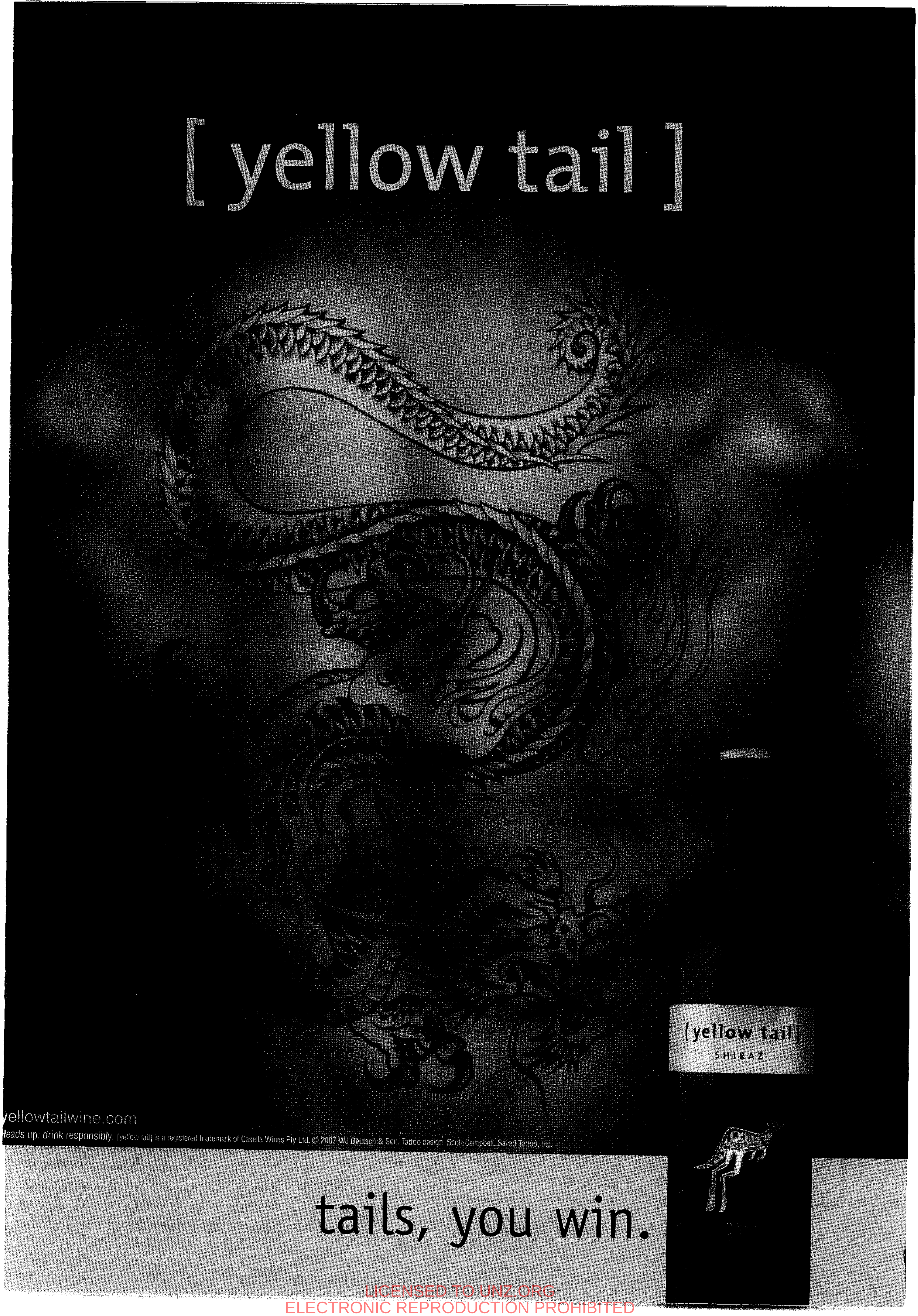
Only years of careful inculcation in the masterpiece makes us hesitate. And rightly so. For when you come to the end of the compact "Moby-Dick" you don't think, What a betrayal; you think, Nice job—what were the missing bits again? And when you go back to find them you remember why the book isn't just a thrilling adventure with unforgettable characters but a great book. The subtraction does not turn good work into hackwork; it turns a hysterical, half-mad masterpiece into a sound, sane book. It still has its phallic reach and point, but lacks its flaccid, anxious self-consciousness: it is all Dick and no Moby.

Just as " 'Moby-Dick' in half the time" dispenses with Melville's digressions and showy knowledge, the compact "Vanity Fair" relieves Thackeray of his "preciousness"—the discursive, interfering commentary on the action that charmed his Victorian readers. In a middle chapter called "In Which Amelia Invades the Low Countries," for instance, Thackeray's chatty, confidential tone is altered by his subtractors into the sparer narrative voice of good writing. The scene is set for Amelia's arrival in Brussels on the eve of Waterloo, and Thackeray's descriptive prose is kept mostly intact. ("This flat, flourishing, easy country never could have looked more rich and prosperous than in that summer of 1815.") In the original, though, Thackeray precedes that description with a loquacious paragraph:

> But it may be said as a rule, that every Englishman in the Duke of Wellington's army paid his way. The remembrance of such a fact surely becomes a nation of shopkeepers. It was a blessing for a commerce-loving country to be over-run by such an army of customers; and to have such creditable warriors to feed. And the country which they came to protect is not military. For a long period of history they have let other people fight there. When the present writer went to survey with eagle glance the field of Waterloo, we asked the conductor of the diligence, a portly warlike-looking veteran, whether he had been at the battle. "*Pas si bête*"—such an answer and sentiment as no Frenchman would own to—was his reply.

And so on, in a similarly intimate, letter-to-the-reader vein. This is, of course, not merely digressive but "sentimental," and, like a later aside about how foolish Napoleon was not to wait until the allies had fallen apart from their own internal differences, breaks up the flow and movement of the story.

Even as sympathetic a reader as Edmund Wilson hated Thackeray's rambling remarks and continual intrusions of mild ironies. But Thackeray without his little jokes and warm asides becomes another, duller writer—too constantly on message. Meaning resides in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the margins; Thackeray wants to insinuate, not force, his way into the reader's confidence. Becky Sharp lives for us not just because her creator made her but because her creator couldn't leave her alone; he is always *there*, fussing over her shoulder, commenting on her behavior, the way we do with real people who obsess us. Transparent, objective lucidity is the last emotion we have about the actual; we fret, comment, editorialize, intrude, despair, laugh, and gossip.

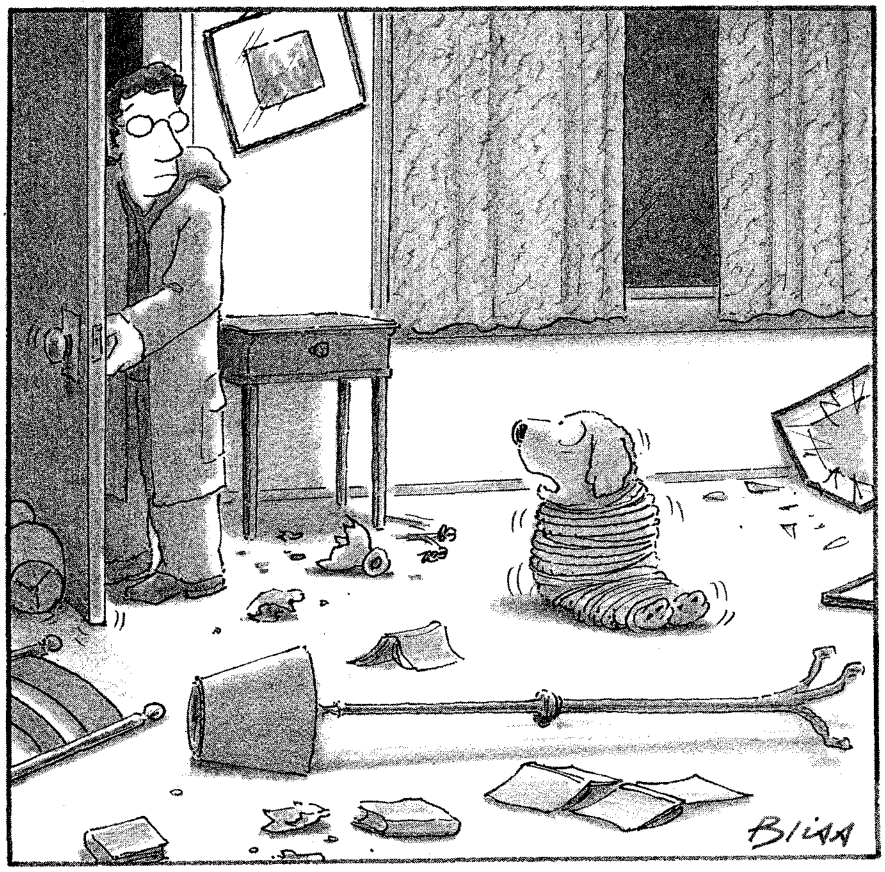
The real lesson of the compact editions is not that vandals shouldn't be let loose on masterpieces but that masterpieces are inherently a little loony. They run on the engine of their own accumulated habits and weirdnesses and self-indulgent excesses. They have to, since originality is, necessarily, something still strange to us, rather than something that we already know about and approve. What makes writing matter is not a story, cleanly told, but a voice, however odd or ordinary, and a point of view, however strange or sentimental. Books can be snipped at, and made less melodically muddled, but they lose their overtones, their bass notes, their chesty resonance—the same thing that happens, come to think of it, to human castrati.

Novelists have always seen their work cut—by the interfering editor or the posthumous abridger—but they almost never see it expanded. Henry James's New York Edition did add late-James lace to mid-James linen, but the sewing always shows. (There are those who think that the late long First Folio "Hamlet" is a messy author's expansion of the short, stern early quarto, but they are a minority.) On the whole, once authors get the words out, they may have to settle for less, but they don't come back for more. For the aesthetic of addition, we need to turn to the movies. We can study it in the "director's cuts" provided on those special-feature-laden DVDs which are by now the actual quanta of the movies—the form in which they really get seen. The director's cut, after all, is not a cut (the sole exception I've seen is the Coen brothers' revamped "Blood Simple," which is roughly five minutes leaner than the version that enjoyed theatrical release) but an expansion, the bitter putting-back-in of all that the assembled execs and idiots forced the director to take out.

Yet what gets put back in is often stifling and slowing. Francis Ford Coppola's near-masterpiece "Apocalypse Now" is, in its expanded and presumably perfected version, also long-winded and diffuse, escaping its relentless thematic concentration for side-lit erotic encounters with *Playboy* Playmates and mysterious French colonial women, pleasing but a little pointless. And no amount of putting back can redeem the silliness of the heavy symbolism at the movie's close (or make a heavy actor look any lighter). What one feels in most director's cuts is not so much addition, new things brought in, as mere chest expansion, the same number of breaths taken more slowly.

The search for meaningful additions leads you, finally, to the director's *commentaries*, which can provide even mediocre films with depth, irony, and counterpoint. They reflect an organic genre; among people in the movie industry, the Angry-Apologetic Monologue is the most frequent form of shoptalk. There is nothing movie people like to talk about so much as how their movie was ruined by the studio or the star. These monologues are often more interesting than the films they superintend, more interesting even than the films they superintend might have been if they had been made as the narrator wishes they had been. They are fascinating in a way that your account of why you didn't get tenure or why your book failed to sell is not, because all but the worst movies involve not just an aspiration toward success but a real confrontation of impulses: there's an idealist impulse toward art and a realist impulse toward commerce, and the clash of the two, however inevitable the ending, is the natural material of drama. It is this real drama that the additive aesthetic of the DVD commentary supplies.

A fine example is the lurid, stylish psycho-thriller "The Cell." It is the tale of a serial killer who kidnaps women and imprisons them in a tank, slowly drowning them, and who is undone by Jennifer Lopez, a psychotherapist able to enter his mind (don't ask). It was directed by Tarsem Singh, an Indian-



"Artie, they took my bowl."

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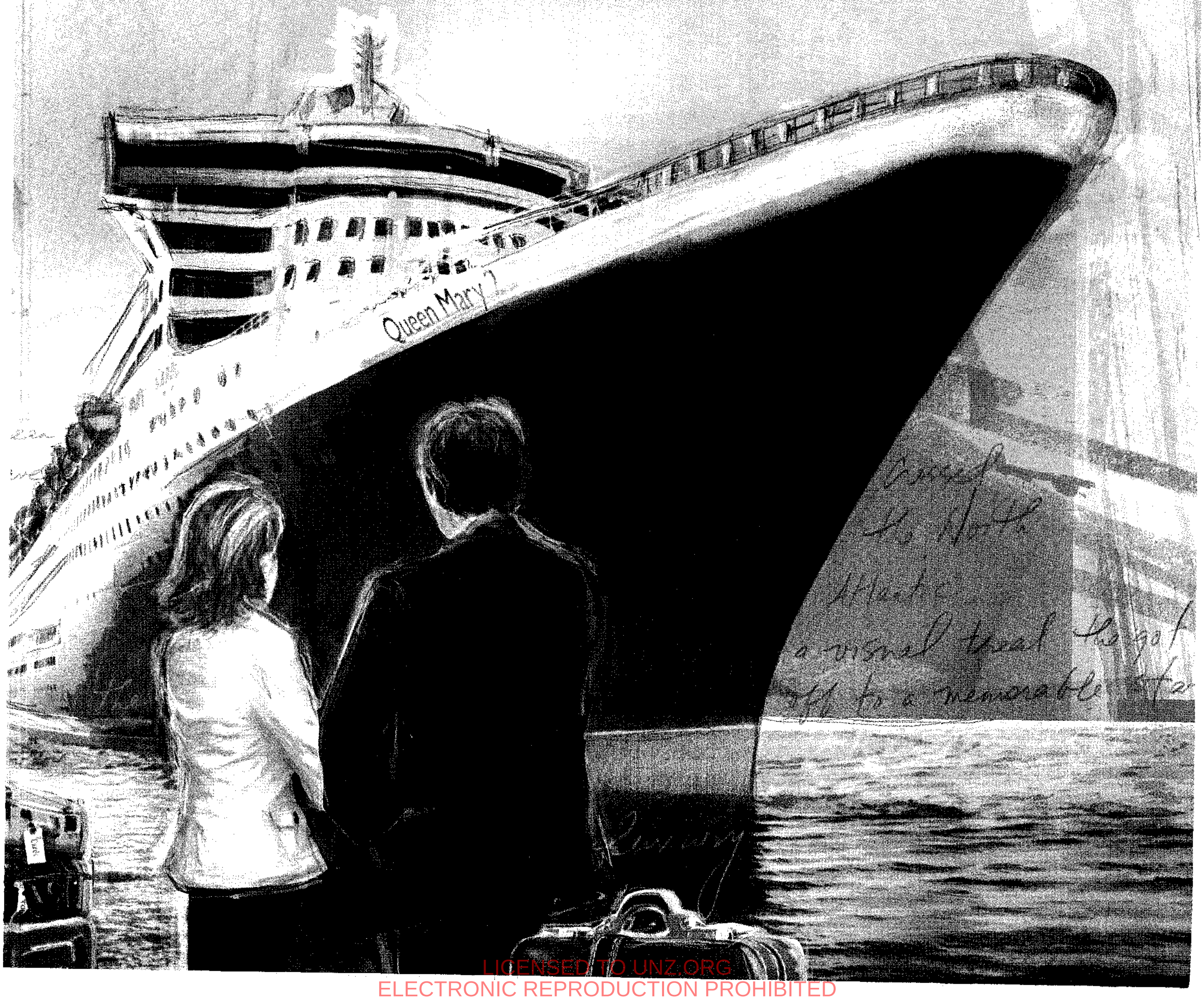
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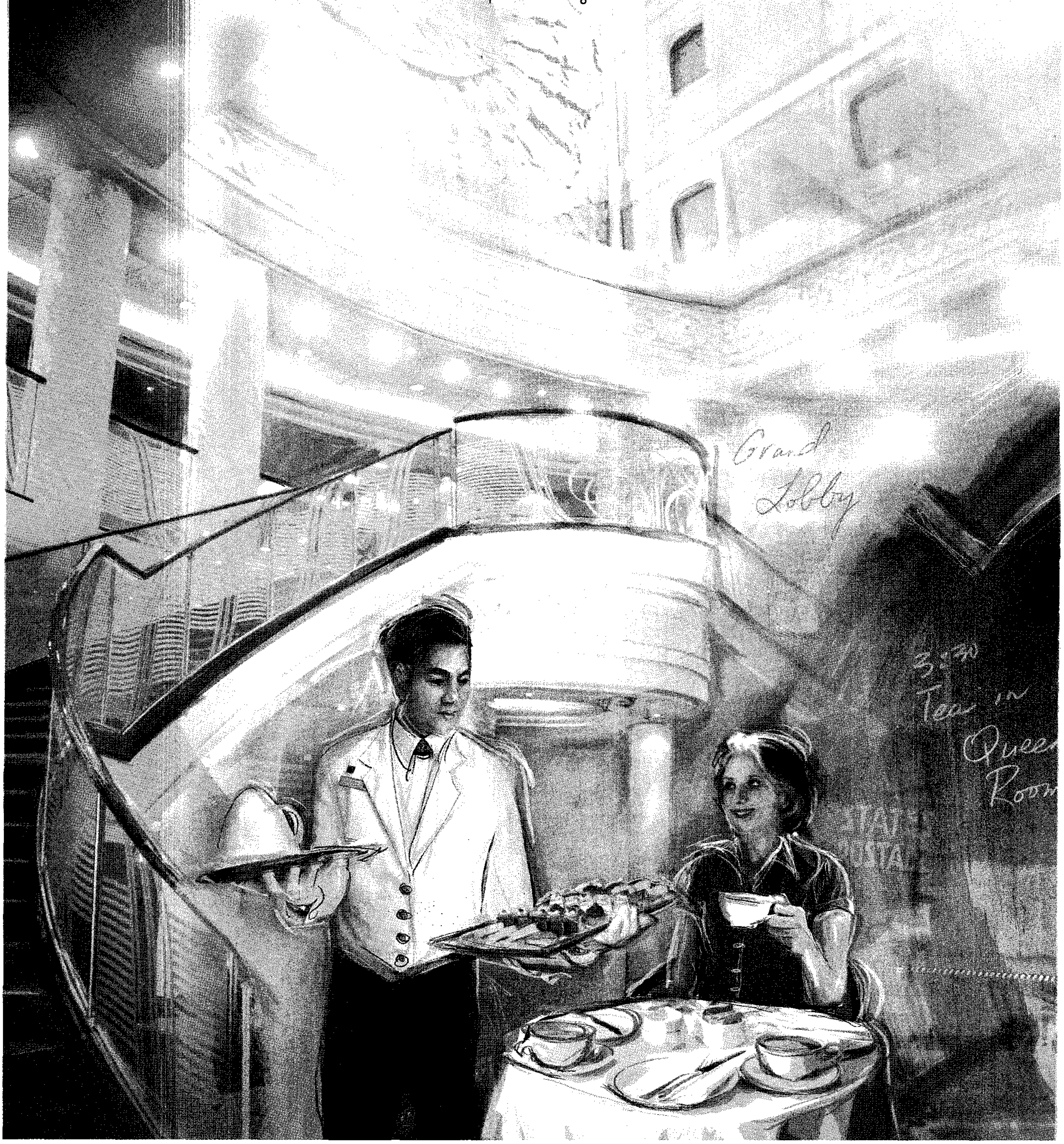

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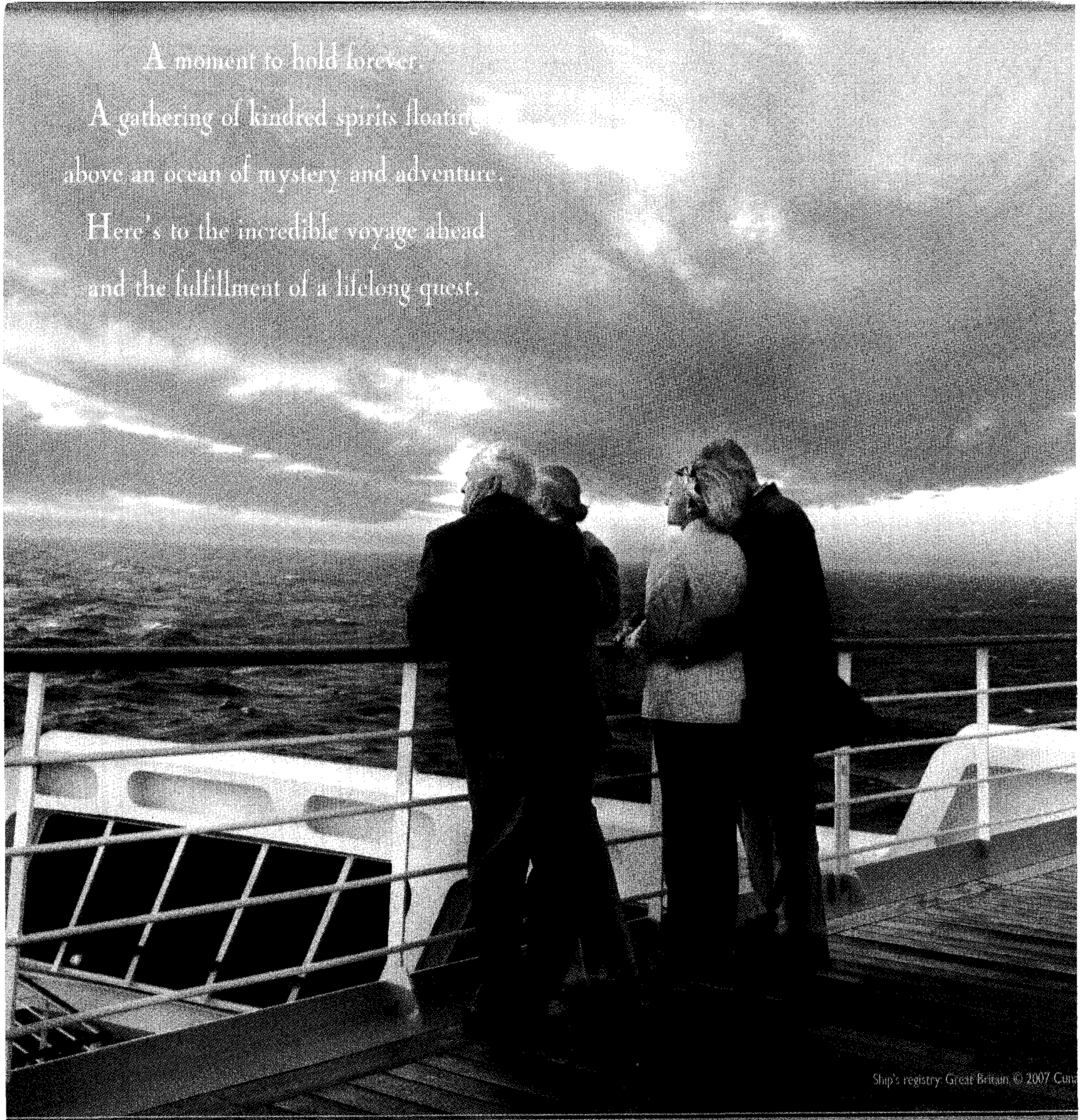
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born music-video veteran, and the reason for the odd emotionlessness of a film about the attempted murder of a young girl soon becomes apparent. "She couldn't go underwater without holding her nose!" Singh says angrily, a few minutes after the main victim-to-be appears suspended in the killing tank. He punished the actress, he explains, who, having promised to swim desperately in the grim tank, turned out to be unable to do so, by denying her closeups. "I just needed to get in with her," he says in a tone of regret. "I couldn't bring myself—I was so hurt."

Or, at a higher level, take Allen Coulter's sombre "Hollywoodland," the intelligent, brilliantly acted (particularly by Diane Lane and Bob Hoskins and Ben Affleck), yet unbelievably dull story of how the fifties television Superman, George Reeves, killed himself or was killed in a very minor Hollywood scandal. The source of the film's strange tone—"Hollywood Babylon" retold as a Ph.D. thesis—becomes apparent when you watch the film with Coulter's commentary. Coulter turns out to be an immensely serious, erudite craftsman, highly self-conscious about his effects. "I was thinking about the Japanese Noh theatre, which begins with the clacking on the side of a drum, " he says of the otherwise routine opening shot of his film; and each effect thereafter is registered and calculated to a degree that would have shamed Henry James himself. Adrien Brody plays a detective investigating the death, and the height of his hair is discussed with aggrieved indignation; it seems that people have compared Brody's hair to Eddie Cochran's hair, whereas, in fact, "his hair is *exactly* the same height as James Dean's." Barely audible sound clues are minutely parsed for their implied significance; it turns out that the extras, looped in post-production, were allowed to murmur only about timely subjects from 1959. Every moment in the mix, every change of light (from the "fading Kodachrome" look of the Brody story to the saturated look of the Affleck bits), every discreet genuflection to another movie is lovingly catalogued. ("Just a bit of an homage to a great cut in 'Chinatown,' one of my favorite edits in all film.") We learn that the longest lens in the Adrien Brody sequences is the same length as the shortest lens in the Ben Affleck sequences. We learn that the director drew up a "flow chart" of gum-chewing, marking the dramatic trajectory on which the Brody character does and does not chew gum, and thereby revealing his moral growth.

The attention to detail is amazing—Coulter will make a great movie someday—but the accumulated effect of all this passionate perfectionism is to suggest a form of self-delusion, the artist having lost sight of the thing most obvious to the viewer, which is that the story he has to tell is too insignificant to hold one's attention for the time required to tell it. The tale of how the guy who played Superman on a cheap, forgotten TV series shot himself lacks the grip of tragedy, even pop tragedy, which demands, after all, that the hero once counted. (Joe Orton's life can be made ugly and tragic because the scale of his gifts implies both conditions; but George Reeves's death is merely sad and a little sordid.) The enormous care lavished on material that would never be worthy of the effort is more moving than the film; the addition adds pathos to inertia. The will to believe, without which a popular artist has to give up even trying, does not just turn sows' ears into silk purses; more often, it makes silk ears, beautifully surfaced and yet still attached to the same old animal.

To dig still deeper into the strange pathos of retrospective narration, take the late-Brosnan-period James Bond movie "The World Is Not Enough." It was directed by the British documentarian Michael Apted, a man of genuine accomplishment, whose "Seven Up" series, tracing the development of a group of British schoolkids of various class backgrounds from childhood to, by now, middle age, will be recalled as one of the classics of our time. (His "Coal Miner's Daughter" remains a very good thing, too.) Now, the Bond film he agreed to shoot contains, within its frames, the single most sublimely silly conception in modern cinema: Denise Richards as a nuclear physicist in hot pants named Christmas Jones. You might think this would be a hard movie to render dull, yet dull and confused it is, leaving even Denise Richards almost sexless and undis-

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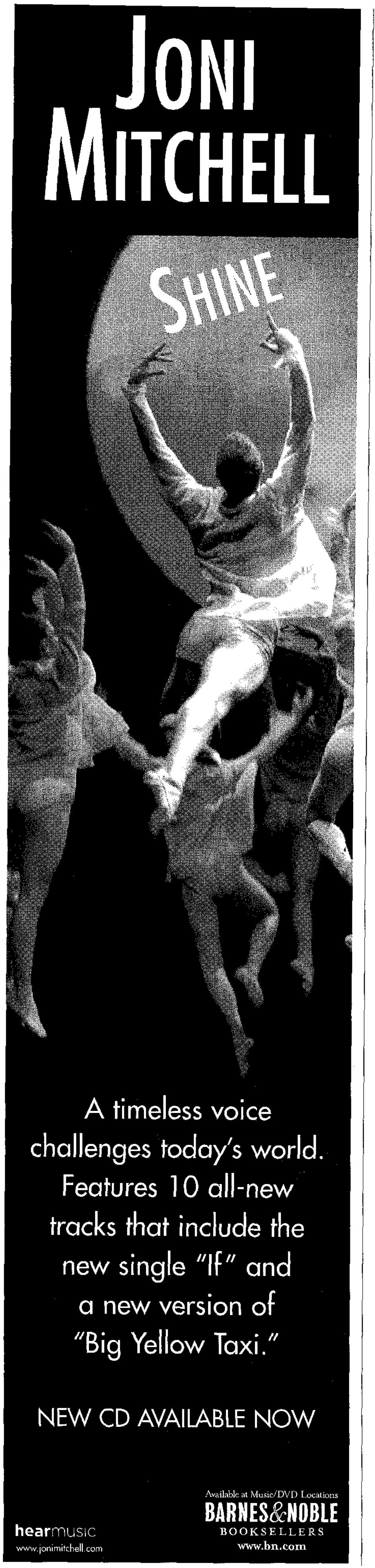
tracting. The reason becomes apparent in Apted's commentary. Apted, who has a respect for actors and a feeling for the real, could not—cannot now—adequately subsume himself into the kind of dumb but deadpan, yet on its own terms serious, stylishness that a Bond film demands. "Blood-curdling action," he announces quietly before some early action sequences, "tires an audience out"—surely a dubious motto for the director of a Bond film. And then, "Gunfire can get extremely tedious, noisy and tedious."

He was brought in, we soon realize, to give some "weight" to the performances, with the result that the action sequences stop abruptly, interrupted by heavy-breathing dramatic acting, up and down the piano, by Sophie Marceau as the heroine and the game Pierce Brosnan as Bond. Apted broods intelligently on "the developing dynamic of the Elektra-Bond relationship," and says sapient things about the "vulnerability" of the villain. When Denise makes her appearance, he says gently that she has "perhaps a less developed role than some of the others," though "undeveloped" might seem to be the last word one would use for Denise Richards. The trouble is that he kept trying to make the movie good in the wrong way. When a babe is brought out for Bond to sleep with, Apted says nice things about what a fine actress she is. But do we want a Bond babe to be a fine actress? A director who is thinking of her as a full-fledged thespian may be a better man than the one who is thinking of her as a full-bosomed ornament. But he is a worse Bond director. By the time we come to a tedious and nearly indecipherable sequence with a submarine, which ends the film, Apted is almost as dispirited as the viewer. He says, feebly, "I did a lot of little inserts of buttons and flashing lights and whatever." And there they are, full of oogah horns and bright-red things that flick on and off, signifying nothing.

The net effect is like that of a funny Malcolm Bradbury novel about the tormented inner life of a documentary-film director, serious and much admired, who finds himself directing a Bond film. This—the sensitive commentary and the cynical film together—makes something that is close to being a work of art in itself, the tale of a man with a tangled conscience and a submarine to sink. The commentary provides the film with the complicated point of view, the detachment, the alienation, the odd play of foreground and background, the sad tone of attentive unease and retrospective remorse that we associate with, well, the classic modern novel. With this film—with so many films, I've come to believe—the life and variety, the sincerity of purpose, the surprising point of view, the humanity and life leach through more strongly when the creator is contemplating his ragtag and jury-rigged and compromised creation than when the creation is left to lumber and stoop and speak for itself. Dr. Frankenstein and his monster together are the subject of art; the doctor alone is mere science journalism, and the monster alone mere horror.

What these commentaries reveal to us is this: the movies we see are the already abridged editions of longer novels of ambition and intelligence, thwarted and rewarded. The augmented film teaches us the same lesson as the subtracted book: art is a business not of clear narratives but of troubled narrators. Western literature begins not with the Trojan War but with the poet's announcement that he is going to tell a story *about* the Trojan War. It is self-consciousness of purpose, not transparency of action, that ignites a poem. The trouble with popular entertainment is perhaps not that we don't have enough strong stories but that there are not enough weak narrators—not enough Ishmaels, whose slack and troubled attentiveness, accumulated sighs and second thoughts make the Ahabs live. Movies need their Thompsons as much as their Kanes. (Thompson? He's the roving reporter who makes the story go for Welles; nobody remembers his name, but without him there's no Rosebud, and no movie.) The insertion of that second nettling, watching presence is what separates the merely crafty from the artful, the compact from the achieved, and guarantees that, no matter how the maker's hand may add and subtract, the viewer's mind will continue to divide, and multiply. ♦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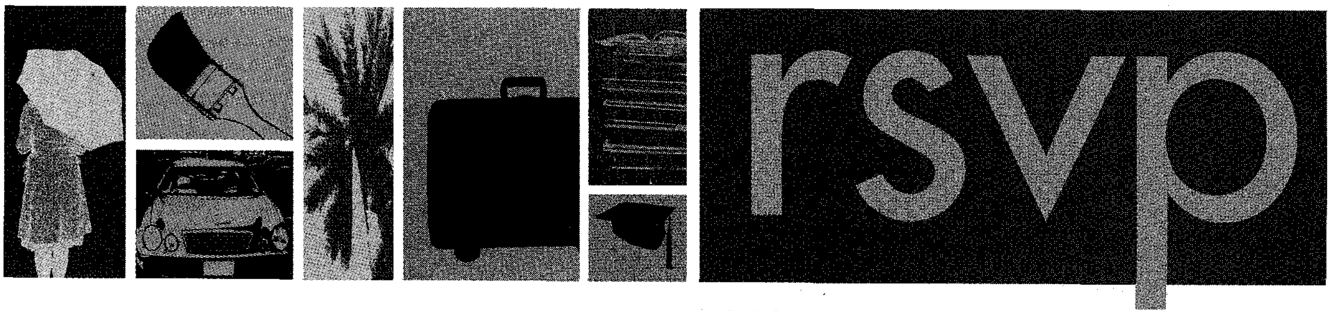

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A CRITIC AT LARGE

THE WELL-TEMPERED WEB

The Internet may be killing the pop CD, but it's helping classical music.

BY ALEX ROSS

In the spring of 2004, I made the questionable decision to start a blog. I reserved a dot-com address, signed up for an Internet-for-dummies service called Typepad, and, to the delight of more than a dozen compulsively Googling insomniacs around the world, began adding dribs and drabs to the graphomaniac ocean of the Web.

Blogs by classical musicians can put a human face on an alien culture.

ARNOLD ROTH

Like many people, I started blogging out of an urgent need to procrastinate. Yet a nagging sense of possibility also drew me in. Classical music, my subject, was thriving on the Internet in unexpected ways. Not all blogs, I discovered, were devoted to cataloguing continuity errors in the films of George Lucas; a smattering of musicians, composers, and listeners were writing on music with intelligence and verve, revelling in the chance to express ideas that had no other immediate outlet. Between 1980 and 2000, classical music more or less disappeared from American network television, magazines, and other mainstream media, its products deemed too élitist, effete, or esoteric for the world of pop. On the Internet, no demographically driven executive could suppress, say, a musicology student's ruminations on György Ligeti's Requiem on the ground that it had no appeal for twenty-seven-year-old males, even if the blogger in question—Tim Rutherford-Johnson, of The Rambler—was himself twenty-seven.

News bulletins were declaring the classical-record business dead, but I noticed strange spasms of life in the online CD and MP3 emporiums. When Apple started its iTunes music store, in 2003, it featured on its front page performers such as Esa-Pekka Salonen and Anna Netrebko; sales of classical fare jumped significantly as a result. Similar upticks were noted at Amazon and the all-classical site ArkivMusic. The anonymity of Internet browsing has made classical music more accessible to nonfanatics; first-time listeners can read reviews, compare audio samples, and decide on, for example, a Beethoven recording by Wilhelm Furtwängler, all without risking the humiliation of mispronouncing the conductor's name under the sour gaze of a record clerk. Likewise, first-time concertgoers and operagoers can shop for tickets, study synopses of unfamiliar plots, listen to snippets of unfamiliar music, follow performers' blogs, and otherwise get their bearings on the lunar tundra of the classical experience.

Chris Bell, the director of worldwide product and music marketing at iTunes, happens to be a classically trained violinist, and he has closely monitored the progress of the classical division. He told me, "An interesting fact I recently uncovered is that, when you look at different genres in terms of sharing and cross-pollination, there's more dabbling going on than you might expect. We sell almost as much hip-hop to classical buyers as we do jazz. We've made iTunes a safe place to try classical music. It is easy to sample and the buying is low-risk." Bell talked about the serendipity of listening on the Internet, where someone might come to the site looking for a souvenir of Pavarotti and end up with the Kronos Quartet playing pieces by the Icelandic band Sigur Rós. He declined to discuss overall sales figures or classical music's percentage of the total market, but he did say that "classical music over-indexes a great deal more over the figures commonly quoted for physical retail"—meaning that the figures are considerably higher than the two- or three-per-cent share to which the genre has generally been consigned.

Classical-music culture on the Internet is expanding at a sometimes alarming pace. When I started my blog, I had links to seven or eight like-minded sites. Now I find myself part of a jabbering community of several hundred blogs, operated by critics, composers, conductors, pianists, double-bassists, oboists (I count five), artistic administrators, and noted mezzo-sopranos (Joyce DiDonato writes under the moniker Yankee Diva). After a first night at the Met, opera bloggers chime in with opinions both expert and eccentric, recalling the days when critics from a dozen dailies, whether Communist or Republican or Greek, lined up to extoll Caruso. Beyond the blogs are the Internet radio stations; streaming broadcasts from opera houses, orchestras, new-music ensembles; and Web sites of individual artists. There is a new awareness of what is happening mu-

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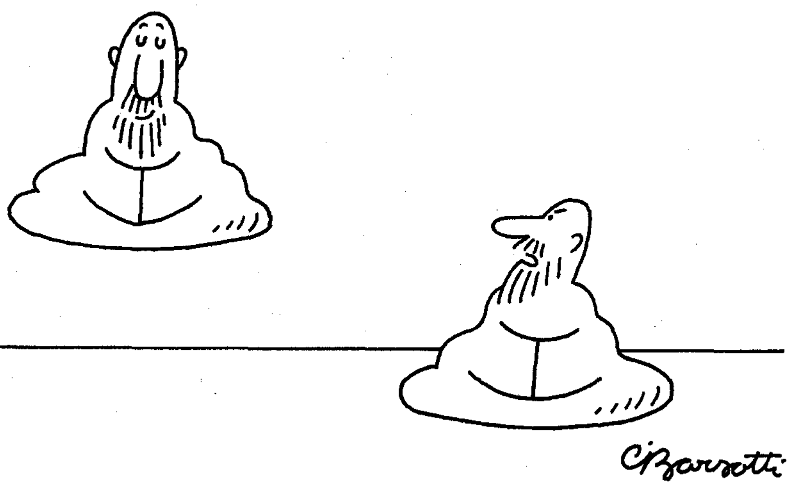

"Showoff."

sically in every part of the world. A listener in Tucson or Tokyo can virtually attend opening night at the Bayreuth Festival and listen the following day to a première by a young British composer at the BBC Proms.

Those who see the dawning of a new golden age should bear in mind the "Snakes on a Plane" rule: things invariably appear more important on the Internet than they are in the real world. Classical music has experienced waves of technological euphoria in the past: the Edison cylinder, radio, the LP, and the CD were all hailed as redeeming godsends for a kind of music that has always struggled to find its place in American culture. At the end of such bouts of giddiness, classical music somehow always winds up back where it started, in a state of perpetual fret. Nevertheless, the classical business is not doing badly at present—in August, the Metropolitan Opera sold more than two million dollars' worth of tickets in a single day—and the unregulated openness of the Internet seems to have done it many favors. Perhaps no one should be surprised at this turn of events. If, as people say, the Internet is a paradise for geeks, it would logically work to the benefit of one of the most opulently geeky art forms in history.

A tour of music's new virtual realm might begin at www.schoenberg.at, the Web site of the Arnold Schoenberg Center, in Vienna. In a handsome twist of fate, the most famously difficult composer of the twentieth century is now the most instantly accessible: possibly no modern artist has such a large Web presence. On the site, you can read immaculate digital reproductions of Schoenberg's correspondence, listen to his complete works on streaming audio, examine his designs for various inventions and gadgets (including a typewriter for musical notation), and follow links to YouTube videos of him playing tennis. Particularly touching are documents of Schoenberg's California period, from 1934 to 1951. In one letter, the inventor of atonality seeks customer service for his new Ford sedan: "It happened today that the cooling system was without water, so that we saw the steam coming out and when we went to the next garage and he opened, boiling water was in." Cannily, the Schoenberg Center, with the amiable support of the composer's American heirs, has treated this monumental legacy as a kind of open source: in an era when estates, record labels, and publishers fight for control of copyright, Schoenberg, love him or hate him, is up for grabs.

Go next to Think Denk, the blog of the pianist Jeremy Denk, a superb musician who writes with arresting sensitivity and wit. The central predicament of Denk's existence is that he is struggling to master the great works of the eighteenth, nineteenth, and twentieth centuries while meandering through a twenty-first-century landscape of airports, Starbucks outlets, and chain hotels. He relishes moments of absurd collision. While he is practicing the finger-busting fugue of Beethoven's "Hammerklavier" Sonata, his wearied brain discovers that the principal fugue subject matches the theme song of "Three's Company": "Come and knock on our door/We've been waiting for you. . . ." Denk also reports the well-meaning but deflating things that people say to him at post-concert receptions: "How ever do you fellas get yer fingers to play together?" Far less mundane is his account of what it is like to play the piano part in Messiaen's "Quartet for the End of Time":

> Somewhere toward the middle of the last movement, I began to feel the words that Messiaen marks in the part, I began to hear them, feel them as a "mantra": *extatique, paradisiaque*. And maybe more importantly, I began to have visions while I was playing, snapshots of my own life (such that I had to remind myself to look at the notes, play the notes!): people's eyes, mostly, expressions of love, moments of total and absolute tenderness. (This is sentimental, too personal: I know. How can you write about this piece without becoming over-emotional?) I felt that same sense of outpouring ("pouring over") that comes when you just have to touch someone, when what you feel makes you pour out of your own body, when you are briefly no longer yourself—and at that moment I was still playing the chords, still somehow playing the damn piano. And each chord is even more beautiful than the last; they are pulsing, hypnotic, reverberant . . . each chord seemed to pile on something that was already ready to collapse, something too beautiful to be stable . . . and when your own playing boomerangs on you and begins to "move yourself," to touch you emotionally, you have entered a very dangerous place. Luckily, the piece was almost over. . . . When I got offstage I had to breathe, hold myself in, talk myself down.

This is a voice that, effectively, could never have been heard before the advent of the Internet: sophisticated on the one hand, informal on the other, immediate in impact. Blogs such as this put a human face on an alien culture.

Perhaps the most constructive digitization of classical music is taking place on a Web site called Keeping Score, which is hosted by the San Francisco Symphony. Michael Tilson Thomas, the San Francisco's music director, has set a new standard for educational programming with a series of behind-the-music radio and television broadcasts. To accompany the TV shows, which delve into canonical works such as Beethoven's "Eroica" Symphony and Stravinsky's "Rite of

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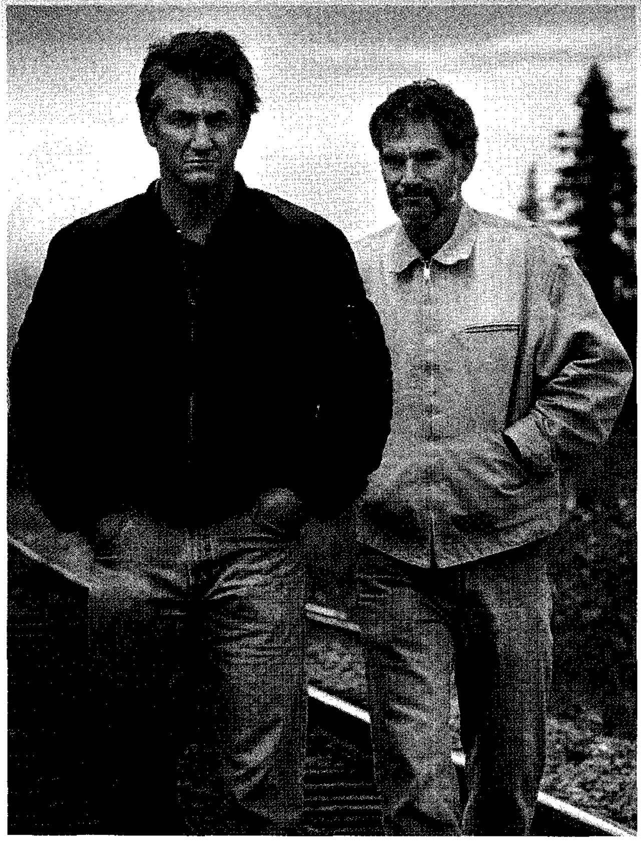

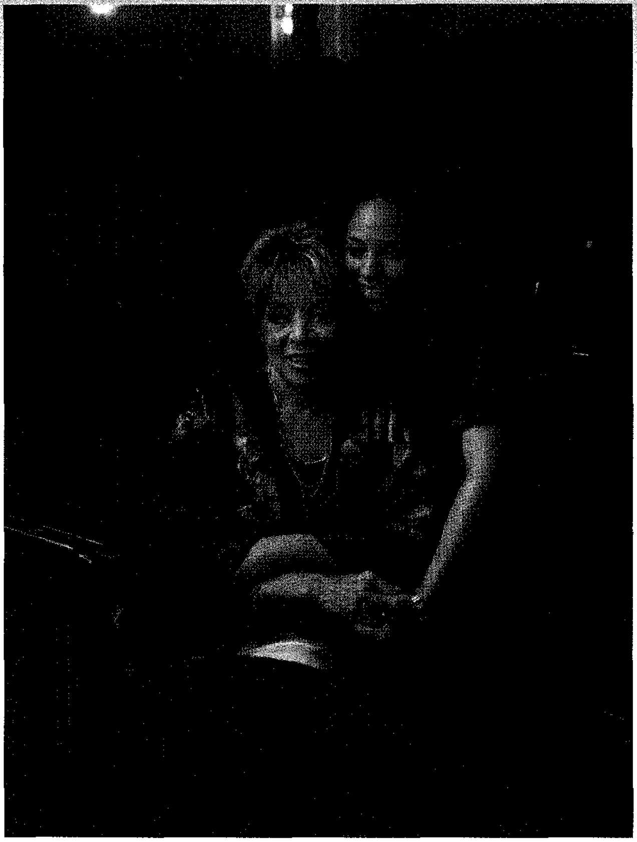

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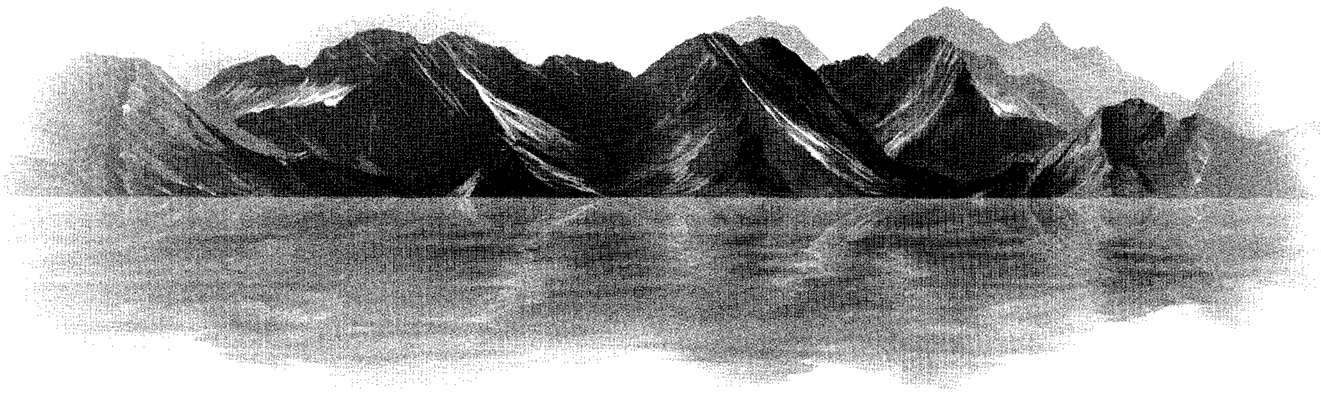

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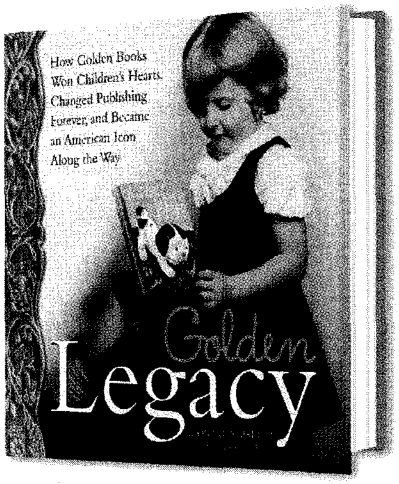
Spring," Tilson Thomas and the orchestra have set up high-tech pages where listeners can follow the score bar by bar, stop to listen to the conductor's explanations of the particulars, and see musicians demonstrate how Stravinsky reinvented their instruments. Not since the fifties, when Leonard Bernstein walked across a gigantic blown-up score of Beethoven's Fifth on the TV show "Omnibus," has there been such a vividly intelligent introduction to some of the fundamentals of classical music. Tilson Thomas is Bernstein's most faithful and hopeful follower, and with these programs he is performing radical acts of demystification.

If there is a man behind the curtain of classical music's online realm, it is Klaus Heymann, the founder of Naxos Records. Heymann is a robust seventy-one-year-old German native who has long been a resident of Hong Kong; his first business venture was a mail-order operation delivering electronic gadgets to American soldiers serving in the Vietnam War. He shifted into the classical-record business in the eighties, purveying obscure repertory on the Marco Polo label; enthusiasts went to him for the symphonies of Havergal Brian and the operas of Franz Schreker. With the invention of the CD, Heymann saw a market for budget recordings of mainstream repertory; he launched Naxos in 1987, recording huge swaths of music, from Adolphe Adam to Zemlinsky. In the early years, he relied on the low-rent services of orchestras from Eastern Europe, and many of his offerings were of middling quality; as Naxos has gathered force, its standards have risen, to the point that its new Brahms cycle features the formidable Marin Alsop conducting the London Philharmonic. In 2006, Heymann said, Naxos had revenues of eighty-two million dollars, and last August was the best-ever month for its U.S. division.

Heymann was among the first people to grasp classical music's Internet potential. In 1996, he put his entire catalogue online, inviting listeners to listen to any track for free. It took years before technological advances made this service practicable for a wide range of users, and, by extension, profitable. "Honestly, until about two years ago, for me this whole music business was a hobby, an expensive hobby," Heymann told me.

Golden Legacy

by LEONARD S. MARCUS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“Only since 2006 or 2007 has there been a piece of return on the investment, through the digital.” Digital sales now account for twenty-five per cent of his revenues, and, because of drastically lower production and distribution costs, he makes much more profit on each sale. Hence the venue for our meeting: a forty-first-floor hotel suite overlooking Central Park.

All the classical labels are eying digital sales as a way to renovate their business. Having wasted much effort in the nineteen-nineties trying to copy the pop paradigm of blockbuster hits—the singular phenomenon of Pavarotti was a will-o'-the-wisp luring them on—the labels now realize that they can make money by selling large numbers of releases in more modest quantities. Chris Anderson, the author of the contrarian business book “The Long Tail,” calls this strategy “selling less of more.” The “long tail” is the almost limitless inventory of CDs, books, movies, and other products that pours forth on sites such as Amazon.com. Some may sell or rent only once a year. Yet, Anderson says, “about a quarter of Amazon's book sales come from *outside* its top 100,000 titles.” Classical music, with its thousand-year back catalogue, has the longest tail of all. In Naxos's case, thirty to forty per cent of its digital sales in the U.S. come from albums downloaded four times a month or less. Thus, a not insignificant portion of the company's revenue comes from titles that, by Justin Timberlake standards, don't exist.

Yet Heymann is skeptical of the long-tail hypothesis as a long-term business model. Posting audio files on the Internet still costs money, he says, and if labels, orchestras, and radio stations glut the globe with archives of recorded material “the long tail will bite itself.” He doesn't think that the CD is obsolete; in classical music, if not in pop, collectors still cherish high-quality sound, cover art, program notes, song texts, and other paraphernalia. Ultimately, though, Heymann predicts that many listeners will obtain recorded music by subscribing to a library and searching for the compositions they want. In fact, he already has such a service up and running. For $19.95 a year, you can have access to all the Naxos recordings that are online. The service has eleven thousand users, around half of them under the age of forty.

“This is the most promising model we have seen,” Heymann told me. “Downloads are limited. In the States, sales are not like this anymore”—he made an ascending diagonal with his hand—“but levelling off. In Europe, there is very little traction outside the U.K. Germany is a disaster. So I am looking past downloads to subscriptions.” He spoke about the possibility of selling preprogrammed MP3 players—say, a fifty-dollar unit loaded with fifty hours of Mozart.

With some amusement, Heymann took note of a recent story in the *Times Magazine*, by Lynn Hirschberg, about the record producer Rick Rubin, who earlier this year became the co-chairman of Columbia Records. In the article, Rubin looked ahead to a time when a listener could forgo the buying of individual CDs or downloads in favor of a subscription to a large-scale online musical library. “You'd pay, say, $19.95 a month,” Rubin told Hirschberg. When pop moguls start taking tips from German classical-music producers, something new is under the sun.

The probable demise of the recording as a physical artifact is a frightening prospect for many people who got to know classical music through the gradual, painstaking acquisition of beloved LPs and CDs. The greatest studio recordings—such as those of Walter Legge, after the Second World War, with the likes of Otto Klemperer, Maria Callas, and Elisabeth Schwarzkopf—achieved a state of glowing perfection that no live concert could match. And perhaps that was part of the problem. Concert presenters have long complained that many avid record collectors seldom venture into the concert hall. At the height of the hi-fi era, recordings seemed to become a kind of phantasmagoria, a virtual reality that threatened to replace concert life. James Levine thinks that recordings have played an outsized role in the modern era; they should simply be “souvenirs” of performances, he told me. MP3s and live audio streams, disembodied and often tinny in sound, are very souvenir-like; they don't pretend to re-create an orchestra in one's living room, and may actually lead listeners to exercise their imaginations as a way of making up for sonic shortcomings.

To a surprising and encouraging degree, recording in the digital era serves to reinforce live performance rather than supplant it. Some of the best new opera recordings are documents of live performances; thumping stage movement and rustlings from the audience add verisimilitude. Many opera collectors have shifted to DVDs as the preferred means of experiencing the art in absentia; Teresa Stratas singing and acting "Salome" blows away all audio-only competition. At the heart of iTunes's classical division are its collaborations with the New York Philharmonic and the Los Angeles Philharmonic; the latter's Minimalist Jukebox festival in 2006 captured international notice because recordings were available via iTunes almost overnight.

Some recent articles have asked whether the Internet can save classical music. Classical music is, in fact, saving itself; Internet activity is merely the most immediately visible evidence of its refusal to fade away. Younger musicians, in particular, are using every available means to reach a potential public that is far larger than the one that already exists. They are not haunted, as older musicians often are, by nostalgia for a time when Bernstein appeared on the cover of *Time* and Toscanini was a star of NBC radio. Instead, they see the labyrinth of long-tail culture as an open field of opportunity; they measure success in small leaps.

The Grand Valley State University New Music Ensemble, from the farmlands of Allendale, Michigan, provides a case study in how new technology is playing to classical music's benefit. Last year, part of the group travelled to New York to attend Steve Reich's seventieth-birthday festival at Carnegie Hall and participate in a workshop. The Grand Valley's director, Bill Ryan, wrote a firsthand account of the visit for the Web site NewMusicBox, introducing his ensemble to a wider audience. In June, they performed Reich's "Music for 18 Musicians" at Bang on a Can's annual marathon concert in downtown New York; their time slot was five in the morning, but, for reasons that no one could quite understand, some four hundred listeners showed up to hear them play. The ensemble's recording of "Music for 18" is being released this week on the Innova label, its arrival heralded by a striking video "trailer" on YouTube, which ingeniously contrasts Reich's hyper-urban music with shots of rolling cornfields. The Michigan musicians play with glistening precision, yet they also bring out the variously jubilant and wistful emotions beneath the surface of Reich's score.

The result is a vibrant recording that deserves to leap from the new-music ghetto onto the mainstream charts. In these unsettled times, it might have an outside chance of doing so. After all, for a little while the other day, a surprising name appeared at the top of Amazon.com's Top MP3 Artists, outperforming even Kanye West: Richard Wagner. ♦

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ONWARD AND UPWARD WITH THE ARTS

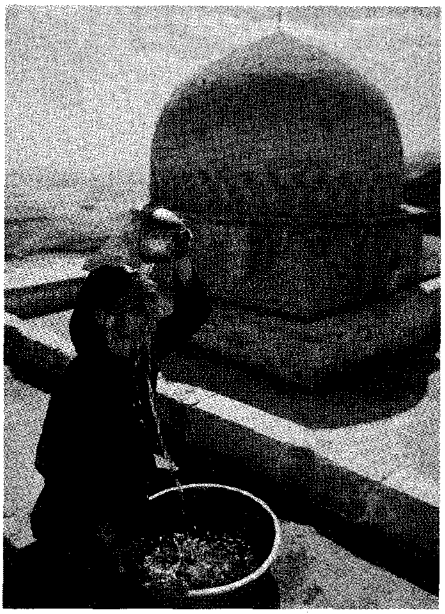
VOICE OF THE VEIL

Can a video artist bring the lives of Iranian women to the big screen?

BY LAUREN COLLINS

Shirin Neshat's "Rapture" (1999) is a twelve-minute video-and-sound installation, shot in black-and-white. On one screen, the viewer sees the silhouette of a seaside fortress; a second depicts a rock-littered wilderness. The sound of rushing wind gives way to strange music—guttural chanting, underlaid with ominous thrums. On the first screen, a corps of white-shirted men marches toward the camera; the other screen fills with a mass of women in black chadors. The men begin to move through the alleyways of a town toward the fortress and, arriving, prop ladders against its walls to ascend the ramparts. As some of their brethren, and the camera, watch from above, a group of the men break into a stylized brawl, their outstretched arms forming geometric patterns, like the cells of a honeycomb. Suddenly, on the other screen, the women erupt in a shrill lamentation. They pray and then, in birdlike configurations, cross the plain, eventually reaching a beach. Their chadors flap in the breeze as they push a rowboat toward the water. From the other screen, the men wave to them. The camera lingers on the boat, bobbing in the middle of a vast ocean.

A scene from Shirin Neshat's twelve-minute video-and-sound installation "Rapture."



Neshat herself in her video "Soliloquy."

LARRY BARNS © SHIRIN NESHAT, 1999/ GLADSTONE GALLERY

Neshat is a visual artist who works primarily in video. Born in Qazvin, Iran, a provincial capital northwest of Tehran, in 1957, she has lived in the United States since she was seventeen. She began making videos in the late nineties, and they soon became celebrated examples of the genre. "Turbulent," a tense split-screen installation that featured a man and a woman in an anything-you-can-do-I-can-do-better singing contest (women are not permitted to sing alone in front of a mixed audience in Iran), won first prize at the Venice Biennale in 1999, and Neshat's work is in the permanent collections of the Guggenheim, the Whitney, and the British Museum. The vagaries of biography and recent history have meant that her concerns have often coincided with those of the evening news. A number of critics have viewed her work through a lens of identity politics, taking her to be some sort of oracle of Muslim womanhood. Others have scoffed at her tendency toward the melodramatically picturesque. Writing in *The New Republic* in 2001, Jed Perl criticized Neshat for not having a viewpoint. "All that a viewer gets," he wrote, "is a generalized mood, a kind of artsier MTV." Neshat does have a viewpoint, but it is an idiosyncratic, psychological one that, rather than offering sweeping political prescriptives (she, like you, is unsure about how to achieve peace in the Middle East), tries to make sense of the particular discombobulations of geography and culture that have beset her own life. The beauty of her art tends to arise from its elemental contrasts: men and women, silence and sound, earth and sky. She has said that she wants people to "take away with them not some heavy political statement but something that really touches them on the most emotional level."

Neshat's work was not originally so nuanced. Her first solo exhibition, in 1995 at the Annina Nosei gallery, in New York, was a series of photographs called "Women of Allah." They featured veiled women, including herself, many of them holding rifles or handguns. Their hands, faces, feet, and even eyeballs were inscribed with modern Persian poetry: Forough Farrokhzad's songs of sexual love ("Weary of divine asceticism, in the middle of the night in Satan's bed / I'd seek refuge in the slopes of a fresh sin") and Tahereh Saffarzadeh's odes to religious sacrifice ("O, you martyr/hold my hands/with your hands"). The show got a lot of attention. Pepe Karmel, a reviewer

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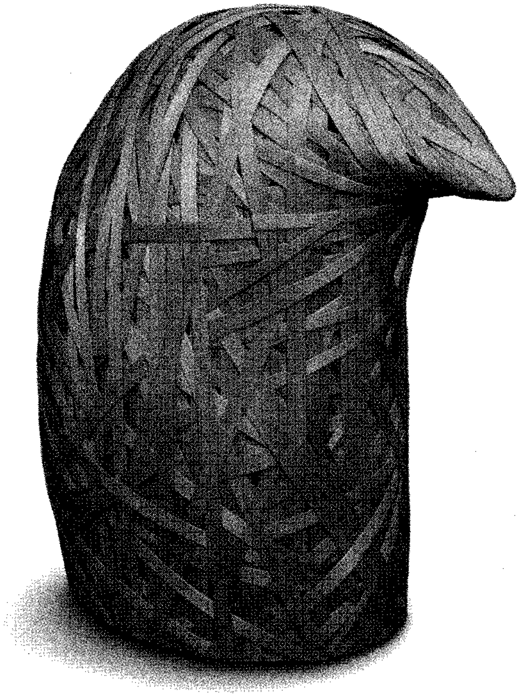

At CIT, we support those who see the true value of imagination. From the transformation of abstract forms to engaging physicality. From meticulous to monumental. CIT is proud to be the corporate sponsor of the Martin Puryear exhibition at The Museum of Modern Art. We feel that one of the best ways to spark creativity is by supporting artists and institutions that push boundaries. **To learn more, visit cit.com or moma.org.**

The Museum of Modern Art
Martin Puryear | November 4, 2007 to January 14, 2008

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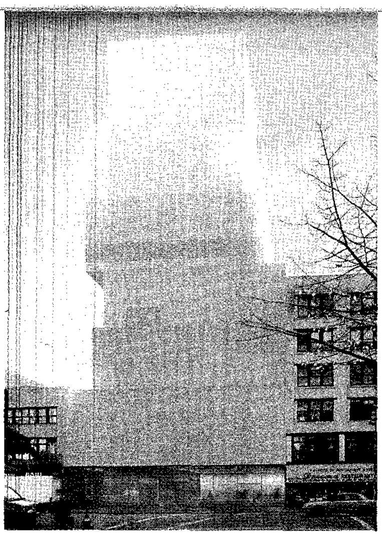
Martin Puryear. Old Mole. 1985. Red cedar. Philadelphia Museum of Art. Purchased with gifts (by exchange) of Samuel S. White 3rd and Vera White, and Mr. and Mrs. Charles C.G. Chaplin and with funds contributed by Marion Boulton Stroud, Mr. and Mrs. Robert Kardon, Gisela and Dennis Alter, and Mrs. H. Gates Lloyd.
© 2007 Martin Puryear. Image courtesy Donald Young Gallery, Chicago.



CREATIVE GIVING

Every New Yorker will want to be at the **New Museum of Contemporary Art** when it reopens in its own dedicated building on December 1st. The lower Manhattan cultural landmark will have a fun look, with its asymmetrical stack of seven stories and an outdoor neon sign that announces "Hell Yes!" Its inaugural show, called "Unmonumental," promises intense engagement with living artists via their work in sculpture, collage, sound, and the Internet.

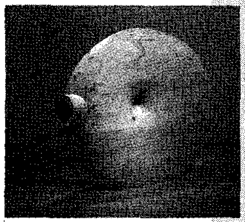
With a goal to insure that everyone feels welcome—regardless of their financial situation or their familiarity with contemporary art—the museum is offering free admission to the public on Thursday evenings from 7 P.M. to 10 P.M. These special weekly events are made possible by CIT, a global commercial finance company. "At CIT we take pride in supporting cultural and civic organizations in the communities in which our employees and clients live and work," says Jeffrey M. Peek, Chairman and CEO of CIT. "Our efforts are focused on helping these groups grow their audiences by underwriting events that introduce their programs to the broader public. Our ability to leverage our best resources, expertise, and relationships to accomplish this has been tremendously successful and we are pleased to offer our support."

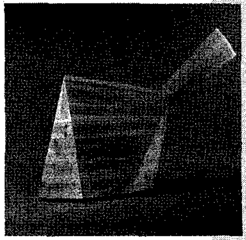
Success for many of CIT's programs is measured by audience growth and by the public's increased access to cultural and civic resources. The results have been thrilling and inventive. To kick off its Opera-For-All program, **New York City Opera** used CIT's support to entertain ten thousand listeners with "Afternoon Arias" in Bryant Park. **New York City Ballet** presented a free open dress rehearsal of *Romeo + Juliet* to more than twenty-three hundred visitors. CIT's sponsorships have allowed both organizations to offer deeply discounted tickets to their regular performances, and the results have been better than expected—tens of thousands of tickets have been sold, and, significantly, to younger and first-time audience members. According to Jane Gullong, Executive Director of New York City Opera, "CIT's sponsorship of Opera-For-All has enabled us to achieve one of our primary goals—to cultivate new audiences. Last year's program sold out in three days and reached more than twenty-one thousand people. Remarkably, nearly forty percent of these ticket buyers came to City Opera for the very first time."

CIT's participation in the Mayor's Fund to Advance New York City has also seen great success. Its support of the city's **Third Grade Vision Program** has meant that in less than one year, the program made 528 school visits, evaluated 7,537 students, and distributed 5,646 pairs of free glasses for children who were in danger of grade retention. Working with the **City Hall Portrait Conservation Initiative**, CIT is helping to restore vividness to five treasured historic paintings, including John Trumbull's 1805 portraits of Alexander Hamilton and John Jay. CIT's involvement has been a catalyst in drawing attention to this program, which has since raised more than 1.6 million dollars to conserve City Hall portraits.

It is only a short walk from City Hall to the New Museum, but visitors to both can trace three centuries of cultural vitality—a vantage on New York City that CIT is very proud to support.

For more information on CIT, visit cit.com





Martin Puryear

The Museum of Modern Art, New York

Beginning November 4th at MoMA, a retrospective of the sculpture of acclaimed American artist **Martin Puryear** will feature forty-seven works charting the development of his artistic career over the last thirty years. Working primarily in wood, Puryear has maintained an unwavering commitment to manual skill and traditional building methods. His sculptures are rich with psychological and intellectual references, examining issues of identity, culture, and history. CIT is proud to be the corporate sponsor of this exhibition.

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TOP, FROM LEFT: © DEAN KAUFMAN/NEW MUSEUM OF CONTEMPORARY ART; © NEW YORK CITY BALLET/PAUL KOLNIK; © NEW YORK CITY OPERA; *SIDEBAR:* MARTIN PURYEAR. *TOP:* DEADEYE. 2002. PINE. PRIVATE COLLECTION.

for the *Times*, confusing Neshat’s use of the Saffarzadeh poems with an endorsement of their political content, wrote, “Ms. Neshat’s imagery seems tainted by a 1960’s-style glorification of revolutionary violence: radical chic comes back, in her pictures, as radical sheik.” Others saw in them an indictment of a culture that oppresses women. The controversy, reductive as it was, ignited Neshat’s career. “A collector came and said, ‘I would like to look at your work,’ ” Neshat recalled recently. “I had three photographs!”

Neshat is small, with a lithe figure and deep-set eyes rimmed with slashes of kohl. She favors an extravagantly feminine yet armorial uniform of simple clothes and heavy jewelry: stacks of silver bracelets, hoop earrings as big as handcuffs, a collar necklace hung with bells. Her open-hearted manner (she giggles a lot, uses exclamation points in her e-mails, and, in accordance with *taarof*, the elaborate system of Persian etiquette, is always offering lemonade or insisting on sitting in the least comfortable chair) hardly suggests transgression. But, because of the sexual and political content of her videos, she cannot work in Iran, where her mother and some of her siblings still live. The last time she travelled there, in 1996, she was interrogated and detained at the airport as she attempted to leave the country. “I don’t really fancy the idea of going to prison,” she says. “I’m not a martyr.”

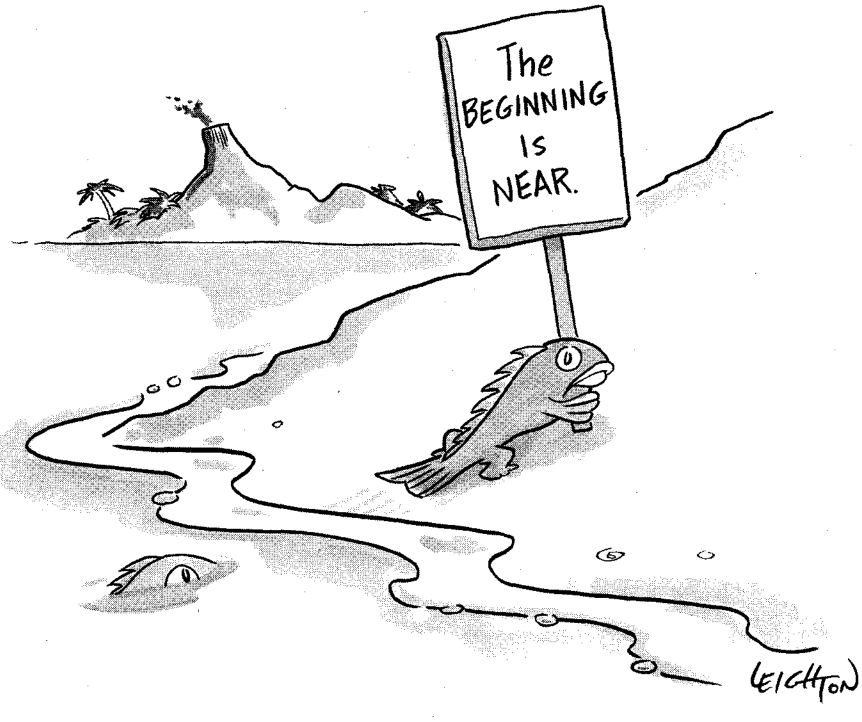
The way Neshat works is collective and instinctual: she comes up with a visual idea and recruits whatever technicians—cinematographers, actors, costume designers—are necessary to help her realize it. She has never owned a camera. Her videos are typically shot on 35-mm. film and transferred to video, for projection onto the walls of a gallery. Her dealer, Barbara Gladstone, who also serves as her producer, sells them in editions of six, mostly to museums, for hundreds of thousands of dollars. (If you buy a piece of video art, you get a DigiBeta master videotape, an archival videotape, and a certificate of authenticity.) They are conceived in collaboration with a group of mostly Iranian exiles, with whom Neshat often shares her profits. One or more of them can often be found sleeping on the couch in her loft, in SoHo, which she shares with her son, Cyrus, and her longtime boyfriend, the Iranian-American filmmaker Shoja Azari. “We live very tribally,” she says.

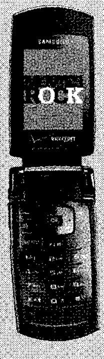
The videos are crafted with a draftsman’s attention to detail. Klaus Biesenbach, the chief curator of media at the Museum of Modern Art in New York, says, “She has accomplished a quality of composition and image construction at the highest artistic level.” Peter Schjeldahl has written, in this magazine, “Neshat’s elegant, two-screen meditations on the culture of the chador in Islamic Iran emit an icy heat of suppressed passions; they are among the first undoubtable masterpieces of video installation.” In a medium that often prizes esoteric nonchalance, her work is unusually fervent and sincere.

Between 1998 and 2003, Neshat made ten videos, but in the past three years she has made only two, “Mahdokht” (2004) and “Zarin” (2005). Both consist of rejiggered material from what has become her main endeavor: a full-length feature film intended for theatrical release, which she hopes will première at Cannes in May. When she decided to try directing, her reputation was prospering. The attacks of September 11th had increased demand for her work, and for commentary from her on Islam, which she has often felt unqualified to give. “I got attention, but at the same time I had to confront really simplistic questions,” she said. “I felt ridiculous.” Neshat’s work has always had a cinematic quality—the director Atom Egoyan has written of “Turbulent” that it “completely inspired me”—but acquaintances warned her about jeopardizing an art-world sinecure with a movie project. “I’m doing this film wholeheartedly, without really knowing if it’s going to succeed,” she said. “I know the price attached. I could fall on my face.”

The movie project was born in 2001, when Neshat received a call from her friend Hamid Dabashi, a professor of Iranian studies and comparative literature at Columbia. “He said, ‘Shirin, have I got a book for you,’ ” she said. It was a novella called “Zanan Bidun-i Mardan,” or “Women Without Men,” by Shahrnush Parsipur, one of Iran’s most prominent female writers. The book was difficult to find in Farsi—the Iranian government had banned it—so Dabashi photocopied the one he had. A wry, profane fable about the interlocking lives of five female outcasts in Tehran who converge upon a mystical garden in Karaj, cultivating a feminist Eden, the book awoke in Neshat a feeling of deep communion. “The protagonists are very vulnerable—they go mad or they kill themselves—and I identify with every one of them,” she said.

Neshat was determined to find the author, who had fled Iran in 1994. She tracked her down in the San Francisco Bay Area, living in a garage apartment. Parsipur, who has been imprisoned many times because of her work (once for four years), and who suffers from a bipolar condition, welcomed Neshat, and the two women talked for hours. “I just fell in love





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with the way she looks at the world," Neshat said of Parsipur, who is sixty-one. Parsipur agreed to allow Neshat to adapt her book into a film.

Neshat worked on the script at the Sundance Institute workshop for filmmakers, and her crew finished production in June, in Morocco. Out of the footage, she is also preparing three more video pieces (one for each character in the film) for a show at the Barbara Gladstone gallery, in January. She said, "I wanted to see if I could work within the logic of art and the logic of cinema at the same time."

One September afternoon, Neshat, Azari, and Sam Neave, a young British-Iranian editor, were at a friend's Tribeca studio, clustered around two computers. Lulu, Neshat's chocolate Lab, gnawed on a bone. The day's task was to refine the video piece about Faizeh, one of the characters in "Women Without Men." Faizeh is a devout young woman whose faith is shaken after she is raped by strangers in a Tehran alleyway. She overcomes the trauma with the help of her friend Munis, who wants to become a political activist. They were on version six of the edit. "Shahrnush Parsipur is coming to see the film on Friday, and then next week my anxiety is Barbara Gladstone," Neshat said.

Neave, wearing a hooded sweatshirt, clicked on an icon. The video played, beginning with Faizeh, in a chador, approaching the gate of the garden.

"I think it is terrible, boring—it doesn't work," Azari, who co-wrote the film, said. He is a substantial, mustached man, whose initial gruffness belies a sprightly intellect.

Few established artists have made a successful transition to directing movies. (An exception is Julian Schnabel, whose films many critics consider to be better than his paintings.) The feature film did not turn out to be Andy Warhol's forte, and not many people remember David Salle's "Search and Destroy" (1995), a dark comedy about a corporate hustler, or Cindy Sherman's "Office Killer" (1997), involving a proofreader who murders her co-workers. Still, Neshat felt compelled to make "Women Without Men," whatever the risks. "It got to a point that it was a biennial here, a biennial there," she said. "You could just smell that they're using you for a time, and I started to get really tired of it. I needed a project that would let me be alone, let me be a beginner again. I wanted to hide from the art world. There was a danger that I would lose perspective—the integrity, honesty, and naïveté being washed away." She pounded her fist against her palm to illustrate a wave eroding the shore.

The first issue up for debate was how to begin the video—did an "art" video have to follow the narrative logic of the film version? Even if it didn't, how would Neshat communicate fundamental information about the characters and their dilemmas? There was also the question of whether a video that would be shown in a gallery, rather than a theatre, could even be conceived of as having a beginning, a middle, and an end.

Neshat: "Matthew Barney would never let you walk out in the middle."

Neave: "Matthew Barney would punch you in the face!"

The group resolved that the video should have a chronology, even if nobody watched it that way, and began to debate what the beginning should be. "I think it is not a bad idea to start from the garden," Azari said.

Neshat disagreed, arguing that the scenes lost context if the girls weren't shown travelling from the din of the city to the garden's eerie calm. She suggested beginning with a scene in which Munis discovers Faizeh crying. Neave clicked on the footage.

"Faizeh looks desperate, and we don't know why," Neshat said.

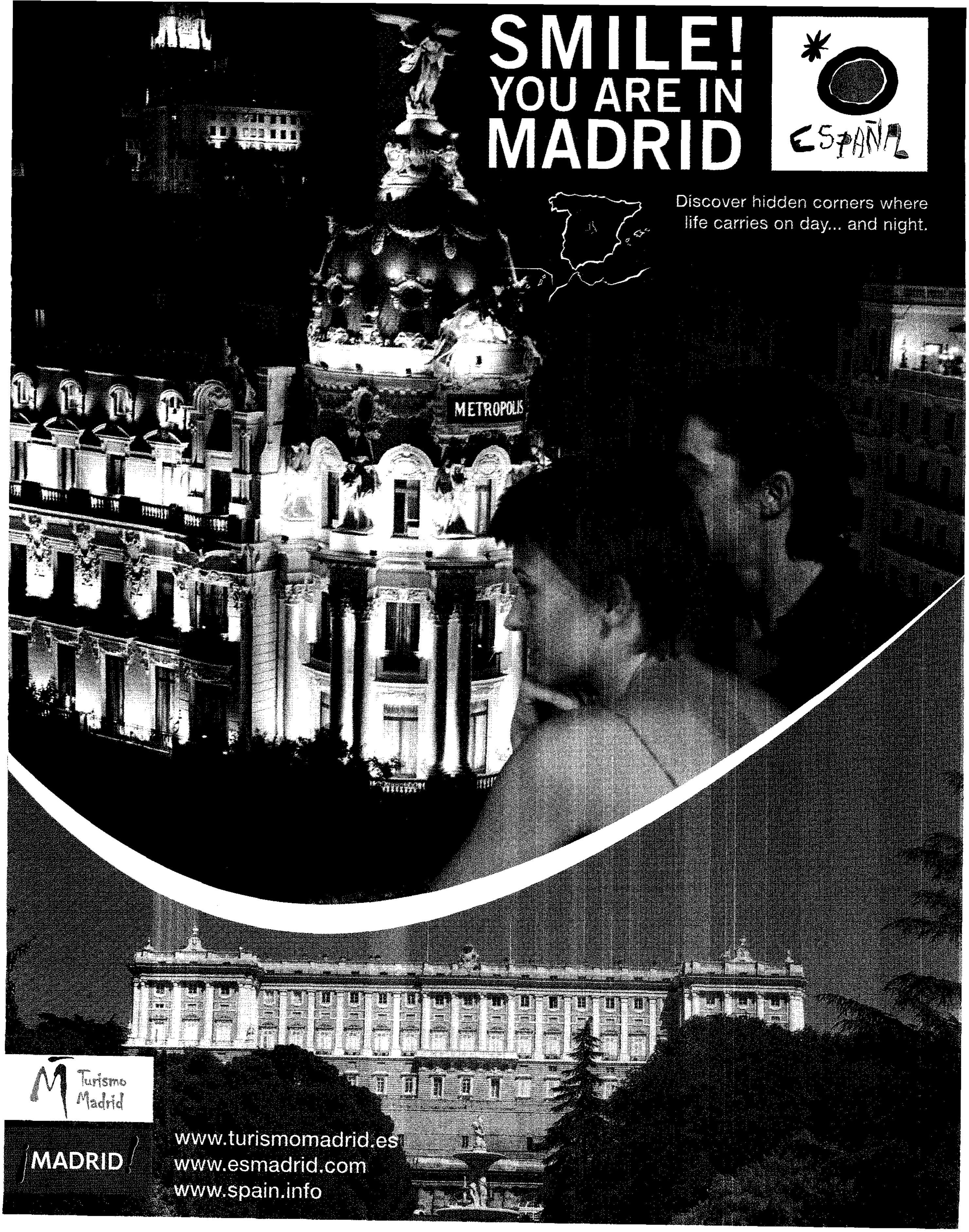
"Well, yeah, that's because she's been raped, and now she's following a dead woman down the street," Neave replied. (Munis, forbidden by her brother to leave the house, has just jumped off the roof and become a ghost.)

"The other way you could go is to have the beginning of the video realistic and then, the minute you get to the garden, it becomes surrealistic," Neshat said.

Azari introduced a more complicated idea. "I think the way we could treat Munis is that she could be her alter ego."

The possibilities continued to multiply. The three considered superimposing faces on the scenes (no), splitting the screen (maybe), and intercutting the scenes in the garden with flashbacks of Faizeh's experiences in Tehran (yes).

"The viewer has to know that something terrible has happened to this girl," Neshat continued. "We have to show that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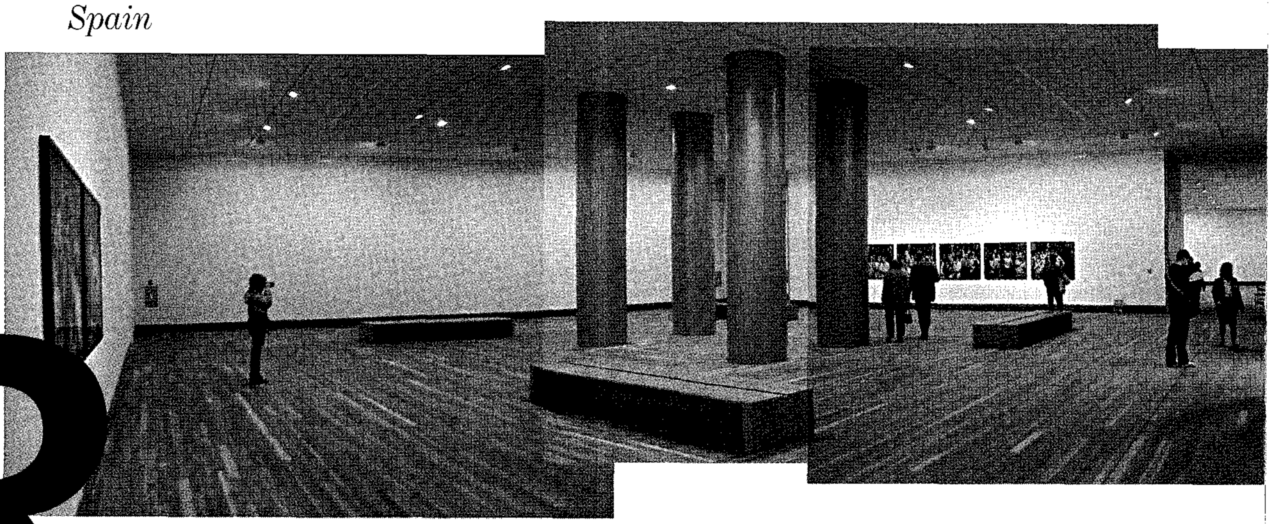

Revel in Madrid

Spain's lively, cosmopolitan capital has a well-earned reputation for offering some of Europe's best night life and cuisine. Revelers from around the world come to celebrate in style at the city's avant-garde dance clubs, intimate bars, chic restaurants, and romantic cafés.

The customary way to kick off evening festivities is with cocktails and tapas, small dishes of olives, cheese, sausages and other specialties that sate the appetite before notoriously nocturnal Madrileños eat dinner. Some of Madrid's most popular tapas restaurants are along Calle Cava Baja just south of the Plaza Mayor, where **Casa Lucas** and **Txakoli** serve these typical treats.

After barhopping, friends meet for a leisurely dinner, often not until after 9 P.M. Choosing a restaurant may be one of the tougher decisions of the evening, but a few notable options are **Balzac**, which offers a modern twist on Mediterranean dishes, **Pan de Lujo**, another contemporary hotspot, and **Casa Lucio**, a local favorite known for its traditional Spanish cuisine.

Besides its vibrant dining scene, Madrid offers a wide range of cultural activities. The city's annual **Festival de Otoño**, or Autumn Festival, presents music, dance, and theatre performances through November 18th. The prestigious **Teatro Real** hosts concerts and operas throughout the year, and **La Plaza de Toros de Las Ventas**, Madrid's legendary bullring, is also a popular venue for rock concerts and shows.

As dinner winds down and performances end, the citywide party moves into high gear. Crowds gather at clubs around midnight, and everyone dresses up to dance until dawn—locals rarely wear jeans or sneakers to bars and clubs. The grand finale to a night on the town is the typical breakfast ritual: thick, hot chocolate and sweet, fried *churros*.

By day, Madrid has exceptional museums to explore. This fall, the **Prado Museum** is making news in the art world as it unveils its grand new extension, nearly doubling its size. Designed by architect Rafael Moneo, the enlarged Prado features new galleries and even additional buildings that have been incorporated into the museum, including the restored Cloister of the Jerónimos.

Also along the Paseo del Prado, the **Thyssen-Bornemisza Museum** has two of the top private collections of twentieth-century art, with works by Titian, Goya, Kandinsky, and Rothko among other museum highlights. Completing Madrid's "Golden Triangle of Art," the **Reina Sofia National Art Museum** specializes in Spanish works—Picasso's "Guernica" is part of the permanent collection. Day or night, visitors can revel in the treasures of this multicultural city.

PHOTOS: CHURROS AND CHOCOLATE ©MAURICIO PELLEGRINETTI
NEW EXTENSION OF THE PRADO MUSEUM ©AROTIPO

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she was raped. And that she had this dream that fell apart—she was in love." Neshat suggested beginning with a panoramic shot that follows Faizeh on the road from the city to the garden. "What do you say, Sam?" she asked.

Neave was quiet for a minute.

"Sam says, 'Get another editor,' " she ventured.

"No, I say look at version one. That's where we started in the first version."

"Is that true? Shit."

The garden is a central motif not only of Persian literature but also of Neshat's self-mythology. "The house I grew up in had a beautiful garden, a typical Persian garden with a pool in the middle," she said recently. "Sometimes I draw it just so I can remember it. Two willow trees growing around the pool, roses, everything symmetrical." Neshat was the fourth of five children in a middle-class family; her father was a physician and part-time farmer, her mother was a housewife. Qazvin was a conservative city, and Neshat never dared to go to the bazaar without a veil, but her family was not particularly religious. Now she considers herself a secular Muslim.

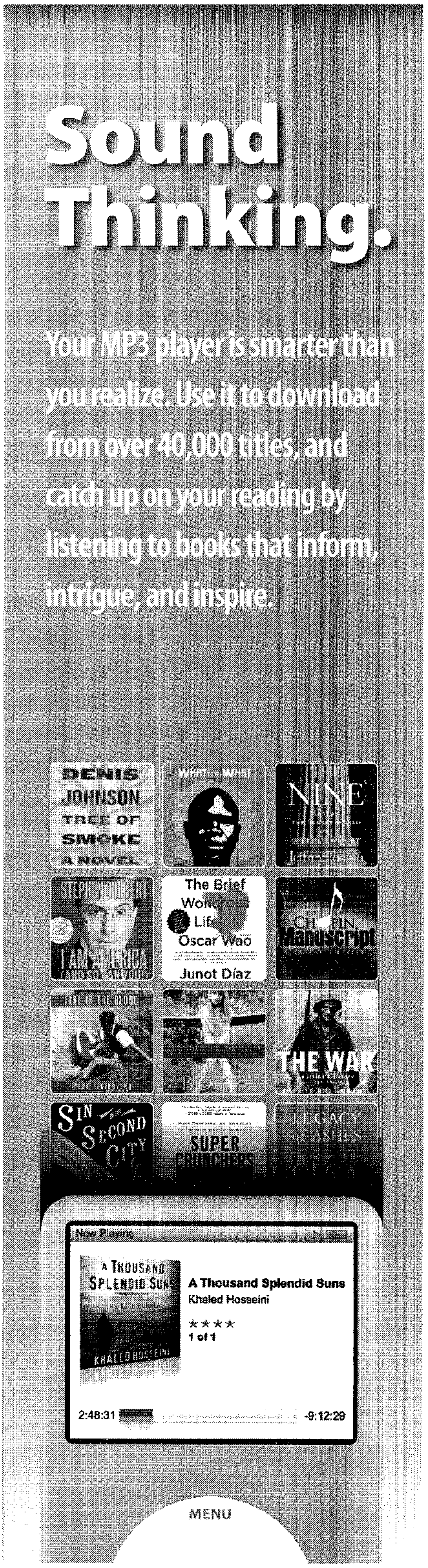
When Neshat was in seventh grade, her parents enrolled her and her siblings in a Catholic boarding school in Tehran. Neshat was homesick, and she became anorexic, so her parents brought her home. When she was seventeen, they sent her to Los Angeles for an extended visit with a sister who lived there. Neshat spoke little English and was profoundly homesick again. "The first few years in the U.S. were the darkest of my life," she said. She stayed, though, graduating from Berkeley with a degree in art. "My father insisted that all his children, including the girls, go to the highest levels of education," she said. "But sending us away from the warmth of the family separated us forever."

In 1983, Neshat moved to New York, where she worked as a receptionist at a hair salon as she tried to get an art career off the ground. She was a painter then, attempting to incorporate iconography from Persian miniatures into a Western style. "My work was so mediocre," she said. "I had two sessions of showing work to gallery owners. It was the most humiliating thing in my life." Around the same time, she met Kyong Park, a Korean-American artist and architect who had established an avant-garde exhibition space on Kenmare Street called the Storefront. "All this time, I'd been in California with stupid men," she recalled. "I was mesmerized by his intelligence." She abandoned painting and threw herself into life at the Storefront, helping out with everything from cleaning and mass mailing to organizing conferences.

She and Park married in 1987, and had a son, Cyrus, in 1990. The following year, Neshat visited Iran, with Cyrus, for the first time since 1979. The country was nothing like what she remembered. "It was as if you lost color and suddenly everything went to black-and-white," she said. She was disturbed by the new regime—the police presence, the dark clothes, the disappearance of nail polish—but fascinated by, even initially enamored of, the idea of a revolutionary society. Her life in New York seemed increasingly bereft, and she pulled away, travelling to Iran every year between 1991 and 1997. "It took a few years for me to really get attached again," she said. "When I came back to New York for good, I left my work, I left my husband," she said. "I completely changed my life."

As Neshat started to hang around other Iranian expatriates, her views began to crystallize. She sympathized with radical Islam's hostility toward Western hegemony and yet was dismayed by its fear of sexual equality; she saw vibrant Persian intellectual traditions being blotted out by black-clad religiosity. She didn't know how to resolve the big geopolitical quandaries of Iran and America, but she began to summon images that, through mood and emotion, could at least convey her sense of searching bewilderment.

Neshat goes to only three restaurants: Fanelli's, Walker's, and the Old Town Bar. They all look the same (dark wood, tin ceiling). She always orders chicken fingers. Most mornings, she jogs with Lulu for an hour along the West Side Highway, and every night she takes a dance class, either flamenco or West African. (In her twenties, Neshat became obsessed with *kathak*, a traditional Indian dance form. "I even became a vegetarian," she said. "But my parents objected. One of their friends said, 'You send your daughter to California and she becomes an Indian?' ") These rigidities provide the necessary conditions for taking chances with her art. "It gives me a sense of security,"



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she said. "I am experimental on some things but not on others. I have to be mentally prepared."

Before she started directing a movie, Neshat embarked on a crash course in the history of film. "I am really in love with the moving image, because it's less of a commodity than photography," she said. "You cannot put a film in your pocket." She and Azari got a projector, and they sometimes watched three movies a day, assigning themselves curricula: Tarkovsky Week, Kieslowski Week, Bergman Week, Buñuel Week. "I am ambitious but not naïve," Neshat said. "I'm not one of those people who think that since I'm an artist I can escape all the rules of cinema."

In late September, Shahrnush Parsipur flew from California to New York to view a rough cut of the movie version of her book. Neshat was nervous; the novella had not been easy to adapt. "The people at Sundance said, 'We warn you, magical realism is one of the most difficult things to do,'" Neshat recalled. " 'That's why "One Hundred Years of Solitude" never got made.' "

Parsipur arrived at Neshat's studio to see the film on a Friday morning. She had brought takeout sushi and was wearing black ankle socks with purple Crocs that she had bought on the street; she was agitated because she had spilled squid juice all over her new shoes. A copy of the *Post* was sitting on the table with the computers. "ZERO CLUE: IDIOT IRAN PREZ IS 'AMAZED' BY UPROAR," the headline read, referring to a suggestion by Iran's President, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, that he visit Ground Zero. The headline in the *Daily News* the day before had been, simply, "GO TO HELL!" "Can you believe this?" Neshat said. " 'GO TO HELL'? Why?" Neshat, many of whose friends and family members have suffered at the hands of the Iranian government, feels that Ahmadinejad is a criminal, but she was put off by the paper's jeering tone: "It's just this superiority complex in this country that has to end."

Parsipur, eating her squid, began to drink soy sauce straight from the cup. "Shahrnush, don't eat that soy sauce," Neshat cried out. "Too much salt!" A few minutes later, the screening began. Neshat clicked a mouse, and the screen filled with the image of a young girl, Munis, sitting in her family's house with her ear pressed to an old-fashioned radio. The movie is set in 1953, and the tableau was as meticulously constructed as that of any Jane Austen adaptation: ornate carpets, pillows on the floor; Munis, surrounded by a samovar and teacups, dressed in a period costume of a shirtwaist dress and pin curls. Still, it did not look wholly realistic—you could detect the hand of Neshat, the artist, in the scene's saturated palette and portentous mood.

From Munis's house, the action moves into the Tehran streets, where a violent rally is under way. The British- and C.I.A.-led coup that, in 1953, overthrew the democratically elected Prime Minister, Mohammed Mossadegh, is just a backdrop in the novella, but Neshat had made it a major plotline. In an e-mail, she wrote, "My film, without a doubt, is to release some anger as an Iranian against the unfair intervention of the U.S.A. in Iran, which forever wiped out the chance for democracy in our country and later brought the Islamic revolution." Despite her insistence on historical authenticity, her depiction of the mob, with its lines of marching men, recalled the abstracted choreographies of her videos. The pro-Mossadegh faction, for instance, was outfitted in matching white shirts. "That is a little inspired by 'Rapture,' " Neshat said. "I studied BBC footage from the fifties, but I did my own thing."

When Munis jumps off the roof—Neshat shows her floating, like a feather—the film breaks into surrealism. As the women make their way from the material commotion of Tehran to the garden, the light becomes gauzy, signalling an ancient, hermetic world. At one point, Faizeh finds herself alone in a forest of incongruous geographies, where wisps of cloud drift through the frame at supernatural rates and pine barrens suddenly give way to swamps. Walking though a field, she hears a noise and turns around to glimpse a woman in a chador darting among the trees. Not sure if the vision is imaginary or real, she walks and walks until she comes upon a crumbling house.

Filming began in Morocco in April, with a budget of around five million dollars. (The film is being produced by a consortium of European production companies.) The cast and crew came from twenty-five countries, and the mongrel society that Neshat had created made for some calamities. She had asked the Iranian actress playing Farrokhlaqa, the matriarch of the garden, to stay in Morocco throughout the three months of filming, fearing that she might run into problems travelling back and forth. Two weeks before filming began, the actress refused, and Neshat found a replacement. When the new Farrokhlaqa arrived on the set, she had gained weight and highlighted her hair blond. Neshat was also concerned that the movie's nude scenes might offend Muslim extremists.

"I was every day praying to God to keep me strong mentally and physically," she said. "It was really a question of stamina, surrounded by men who could do anything." Neshat believes in the equality of the sexes, but not in their equivalence, and she can be harsh toward those, especially women, who she feels have violated decorum. One married actress, she said, was behaving like a diva, "flirting with all the men," and Neshat told her that if she didn't stop she would have to leave. In January, Neshat ran into a movie-business friend at a film festival in Rotterdam. "Shirin, it's not too late!" he said. "Just give it up. This book was not meant to be made into a film. Go back to making your nice little video installations!"

In the studio in Tribeca, after almost two hours, the final credits rolled. "It's a very good film," Parsipur declared, "but it's far from the book." She began to enumerate her grievances: "The brother prays too much. You must cut the first prayer. It's too many times in one day."

"O.K.," Neshat said. "Just show him combing his hair or something?"

Parsipur continued, "The dialogue between the man and Munis is weak. Everyone tells Farrokhlaqa how beautiful she is at the party scene, but she's not that beautiful." She went on, "In the Faizeh scene, when she asks for water, Farrokhlaqa should just give her the water, not talk."

Neshat explained to Parsipur that she had cut a main character, Mahdokht, from the movie, because "it was so easy for it to become corny."

Parsipur grimaced and began fanning herself with a FedEx envelope. After a few minutes, though, she smiled, and told Neshat that she was content. "When I don't see my imagination, I become sad," she said. "But this is *your* film." ♦

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A slide show of Neshat's work.

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ANNALS OF LETTERS

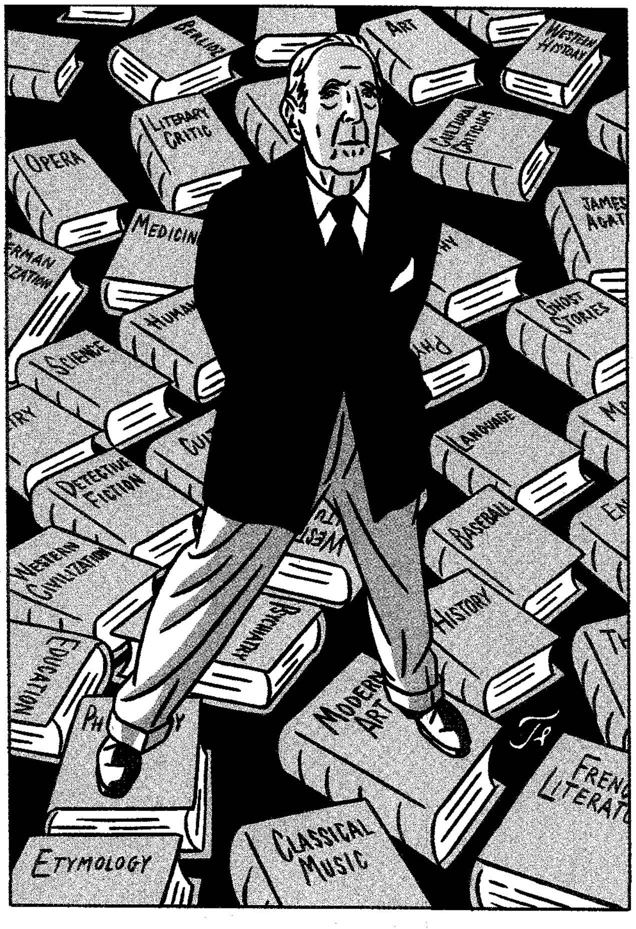
AGE OF REASON

In his hundred years, Jacques Barzun has learned a thing or two.

BY ARTHUR KRYSTAL

For the past few years, Jacques Barzun has been dreaming more and more in French. Sometimes two people are speaking—one in English, the other in French—as though nothing could be more natural than the cadences of one language summoning the other. If awakened by the chatter, Barzun isn't sure whether he has dreamed in French and incorporated a native English speaker, or vice versa. He finds these conversations oddly soothing, but he recognizes that they're a sign of aging, the tic of a mind seeking a moment when all the world spoke French.

These days, Barzun doesn't have much occasion to speak the language of Flaubert, whose grammar and syntax, by the way, he considers slovenly. He lives with his wife, Marguerite, in her home town of San Antonio, Texas, where he retired after spending more than seventy years in New York, most of them on the faculty of Columbia University. Barzun is usually out of bed by 6 A.M. He brews coffee, reads the San Antonio *Express-News*, exercises for forty minutes, and heads down the hall to his study. After lunch, he dips into the manuscripts and books that people send him, answers letters, and takes calls from family members and friends. In the afternoon, he likes to read in the sunroom, whose white brick walls and black-and-white tiled floor accommodate without protest a mélange of armchairs and end tables of no particular style. But then all the furnishings in the house—including the art: Piranesi fortifications, Daumier scenes of Parisian life, Expressionist studies by Cleve Gray, and bright watercolors of flowers and plants by Marguerite—have an aesthetic compatibility that seems to issue more from accident than from design. Cocktails are at six-thirty (Barzun favors Manhattans); a light dinner follows, then a session with the New York *Times*. Barzun doesn't watch TV and is usually in bed by nine-thirty. Not long afterward, someone starts speaking in French.



The secret to Barzun's erudition is a delight in learning.

Next month, Barzun, the eminent historian and cultural critic, will turn one hundred. His idea of celebrating his centenary is to put the finishing touches on his thirty-eighth book (not counting translations). Among his areas of expertise are French and German literature, music, education, ghost stories, detective fiction, language, and etymology. Barzun has examined Poe as proofreader, Abraham Lincoln as stylist, Diderot as satirist, and Liszt as reader; he has burnished the reputations of Thomas Beddoes, James Agate, and John Jay Chapman; and he has written so many reviews and essays that his official biographer is loath to put a number on them. There's nothing hasty or haphazard about these evaluations. Barzun's breadth of erudition has been a byword among friends and colleagues for six decades. Yet, in spite of his degrees and awards (he was made a Chevalier de l'Ordre National de la Légion d'Honneur and has received the Presidential Medal of Freedom), Barzun regards himself in many respects as an "amateur" (the Latin root, *amator*, means "lover"), someone who takes genuine pleasure in what he learns about. More than any other historian of the past four generations, Barzun has stood for the seemingly contradictory ideas of scholarly rigor and unaffected enthusiasm.

One of those enthusiasms produced what may be his most frequently quoted sentence: "Whoever wants to know the heart and mind of America had better learn baseball." The line, extracted from his book "God's Country and Mine," is inscribed on a plaque at the Baseball Hall of Fame and routinely trotted out by news anchors and NPR commentators. Sometimes, Barzun worries that after his books go out of print only those fourteen words will be remembered. Or so he said one evening not long ago, when I was visiting him in San Antonio. We had finished dinner and were sitting in the living room. When he saw me looking at a portrait of his mother by Albert Gleizes, Barzun remarked that it was the third Cubist portrait ever done. "Not the third Cubist *picture*," he cautioned, "the third Cubist portrait." He thinks the first may have been Picasso's "Woman Seated in an Armchair," and the second Gleizes's "Portrait of Jacques Nayral." Barzun's taste and attitudes

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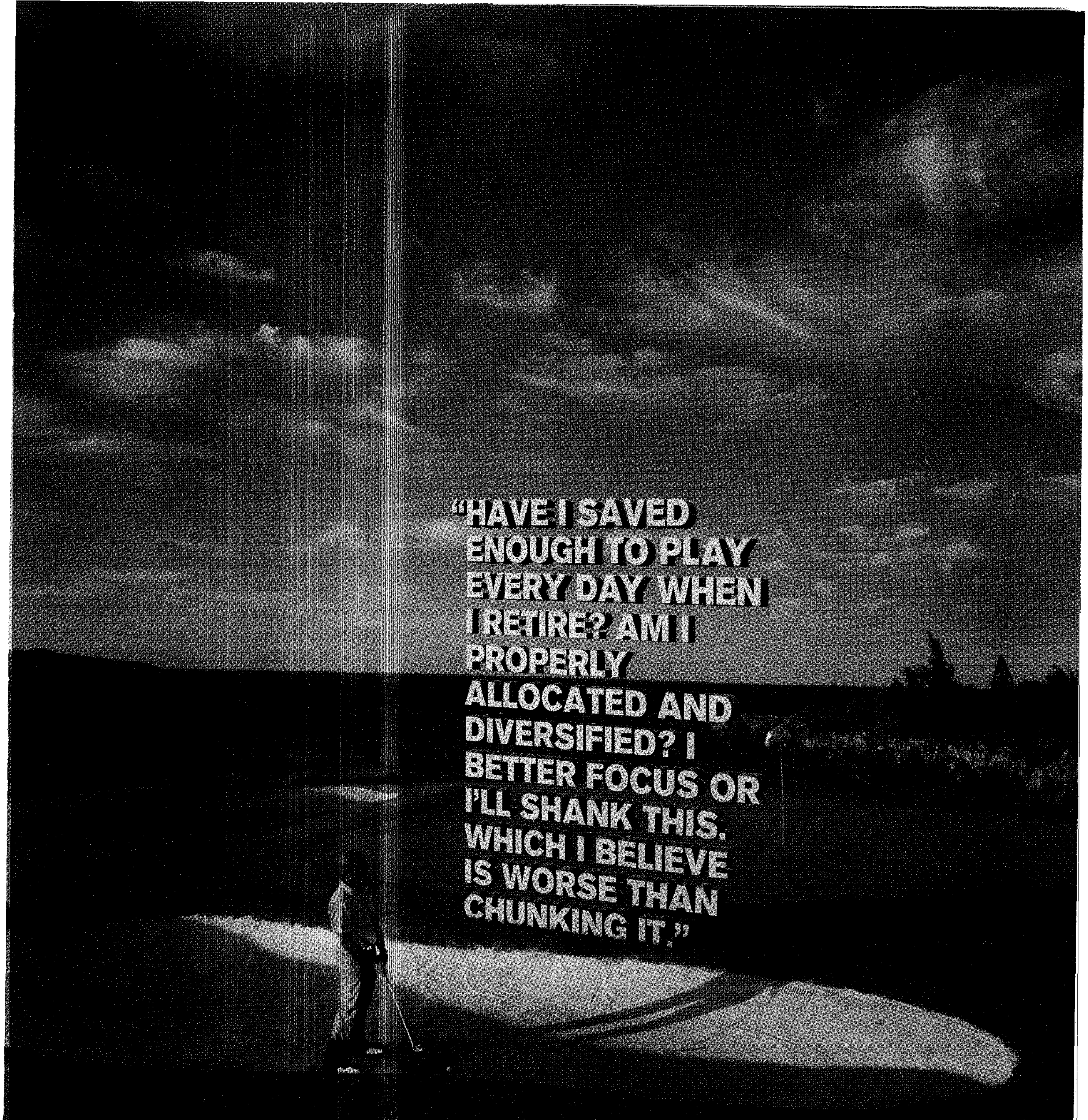
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were formed at the beginning of the modernist movement—he played in Duchamp's studio and attended the orchestral opening of Stravinsky's "Le Sacre du Printemps"—and he has yet to come around to the cultural aftermath.

Barzun's declinist views about Western civilization are no secret. One reason that "From Dawn to Decadence," an eight-hundred-page history of Western civilization from 1500 to the present, which he published at the age of ninety-two, was such an improbable best-seller ("the damnedest story you'll ever read," David Gates called it in *Newsweek*) was its contention that Western civilization is winding down, that "the forms of art as of life seem exhausted." But, when Barzun insists that he sees "the end of the high creative energies at work since the Renaissance," his tone is less that of someone appalled by what's happening than of someone simply recording the ocean currents.

Barzun began to appreciate the transience of civilization almost as soon as he learned what the word meant. Born outside Paris in 1907, he was six years old when the First World War broke out. Early on, he had a sense that, in Paul Valéry's harsh aperçu, "a civilization has the same fragility as a life." The war shattered the world that he knew and, as he later wrote, "visibly destroyed that nursery of living culture." This isn't entirely a figure of speech. On Saturdays before the war, his parents' living room had been a raucous salon where many of Europe's leading avant-garde artists and writers gathered: Varèse played the piano, Ozenfant and Delaunay debated, Cocteau told lies, and Apollinaire declaimed. Brancusi often stopped by, as did Léger, Kandinsky, Jules Romains, Duchamp, and Pound.

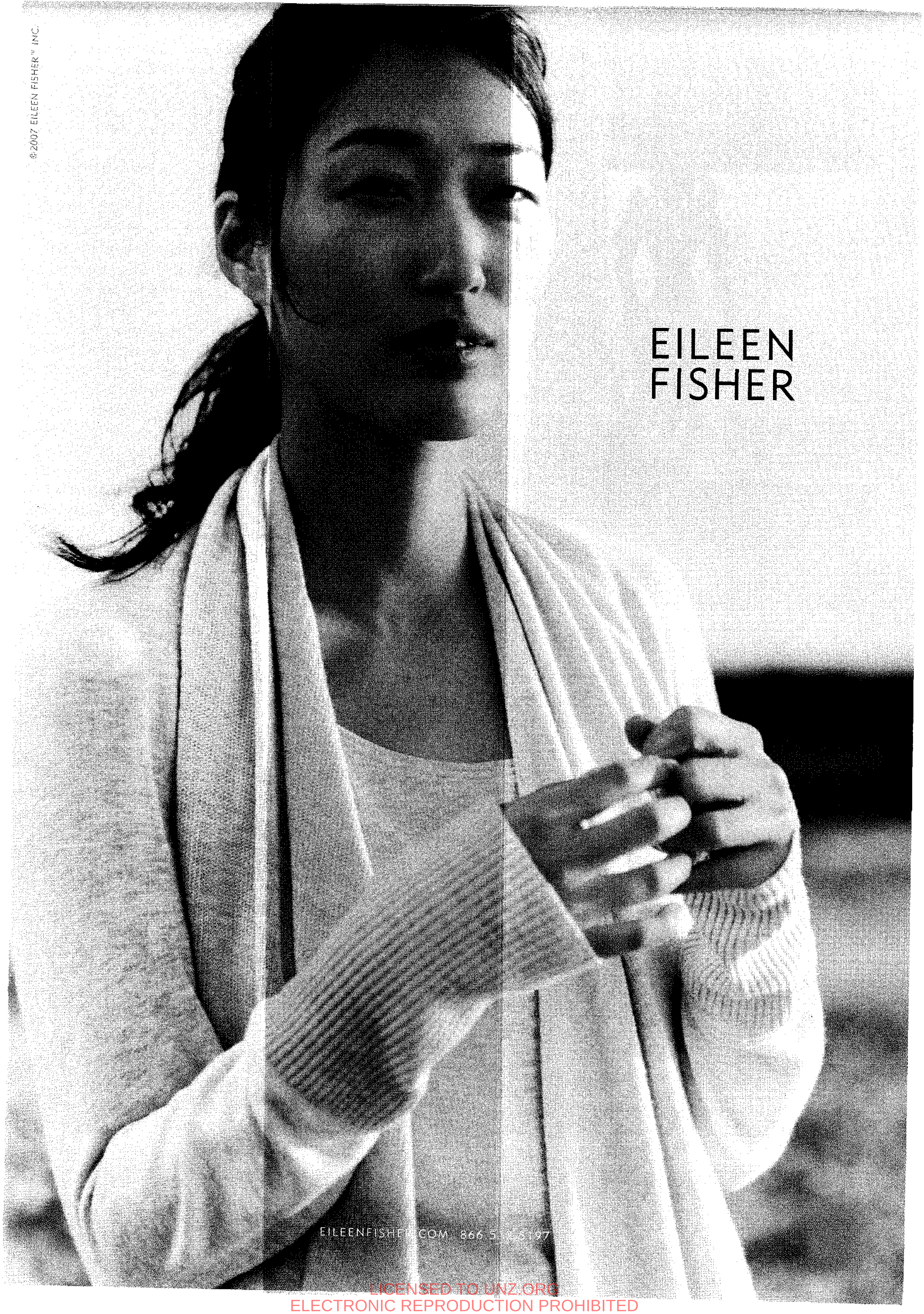
In 1914, when the shells began to fall, the visits gradually ceased; soon came the names of the dead. His parents tried to conceal the losses, but the boy became depressed and, as he learned later, began hinting at suicide. At the age of ten, his parents bundled him off to the seashore at Dinard, where he immersed himself in Shakespeare and James Fenimore Cooper.

It's tempting to relate Barzun's skepticism about recent cultural developments (he's inclined to regard the provocations of later artists, from John Cage to Damien Hirst, as leaves from a tree that was planted before the First World War) to the intensity of his childhood milieu and its abrupt disappearance. Barzun readily acknowledges that the accident of birth is "bound to have irreversible consequences," but he rejects the idea that his character or sense of the world derives from any loss that he might have suffered as a child. In fact, when I broached the possibility that his precise way of formulating ideas and strict attention to empirical evidence are distinctive qualities of the civilization that he saw disintegrate before his eyes, his response was gently quizzical. "Why must you find trauma where there is none?" he asked. "I grew up a child of a bourgeois family, with emancipated parents who surrounded themselves with people who talked about ideas. My views were formed by my parents, by the lycée, and by my reading. How else should I be?"

With the war over, Barzun's father, the poet and diplomat Henri Martin Barzun, offered his only son a choice of completing his studies in England or in America. Barzun, with visions of Chingachgook dancing in his head, didn't hesitate, and in 1920 the family settled in New Rochelle. Barzun, with the aid of tutors, entered Columbia at fifteen. His student life presaged his professional one. He majored in history, reviewed theatre for the daily *Spectator*, edited the monthly literary magazine, became the president of the Philolexian Society, and, together with his friend Wendell Hertig Taylor, kept a running tally of every mystery book that came along. Their brief descriptions, scribbled on three-by-five-inch index cards, eventually coalesced into "A Catalogue of Crime," one of the foremost reference works in the mystery/suspense genre. He also managed to graduate as valedictorian of his class, a feat he considers less impressive than having written the 1928 Varsity Show, "Zuleika, or the Sultan Insulted."

Barzun joined the history faculty a year after graduating, at a moment when British and American universities, despite a general dislike of things Teutonic, were in thrall to the ideal of *Wissenschaft*, or scientific knowledge. Philosophers such as Wilhelm Dilthey had argued that history was a succession of conceptual forms and styles, capable of being classified and studied methodically. (Another German, of course, had maintained that class struggle was actually the transformative force behind historical events.) History was now thought too serious to be left to biographers and storytellers; and even Lord Acton urged his students to "study problems in preference to periods." Barzun, though hardly a practitioner of the old popes-and-princes school of history (his first books examined ideas about race and freedom), disapproved of attempts to refashion history as a social science. History wasn't "a piece of crockery dredged up from the Titanic," he wrote; it was, "first, the shipwreck, then a piece of writing." He demanded, therefore, that historical narrative include "the range and wildness of individuality, the pivotal force of trifles, the manifestations of greatness, the failures of unquestioned talent." His models were Burkhardt, Gibbon, Macaulay, and Michelet, authors of imperfect mosaics characterized by a strong narrative line. As for philosopher-historians like Vico, Herder, and Spengler, Barzun held that they did not, despite creating prodigious works of learning, write histories at all: "It is not a paradox to say that in seeking a law of history those passionate minds were giving up their interest in history."

In Columbia, Barzun found a genial host for his far-flung interests. In addition to the broadly conceived Contemporary Civilization course, Columbia offered a General Honors class—later, the Colloquium on Important Books—that let a select group of upperclassmen read the Western classics with instructors from two fields. When Barzun was assigned to the Colloquium, in 1934, his teaching partner was the English instructor Lionel Trilling. Among the most influential literary critics to emerge from the academy, Trilling admitted late in life that he had once stood "puzzled, abashed, and a little queasy" before the "high artistic culture of the modern age," a discomfort no doubt torqued by sitting at a table next to a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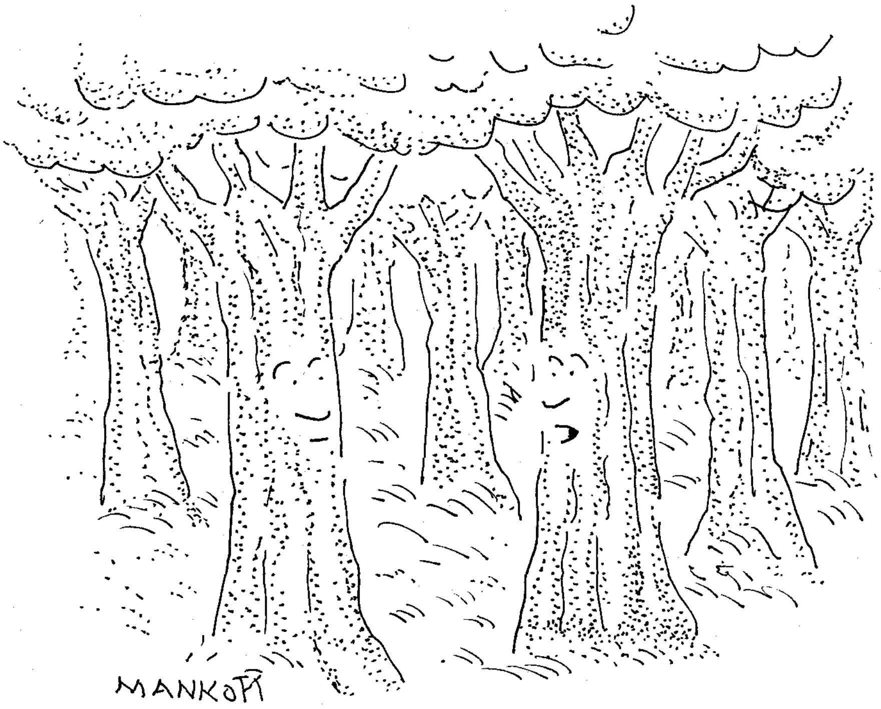
man whose mind had been formed at first hand by that culture. The Colloquium, as the word implies, was a conversation, and in 1934 it became not merely a conversation between instructors and undergraduates but also a dialogue between the two men that lasted until Trilling's death, in 1975.

Dissimilar in many respects, the urbane, Americanized Frenchman, with his easy manner, and the shy, intense, Jewish writer-aspirant from Queens, who had only recently renounced his Marxist views, soon shared their thoughts, showed each other drafts of their work, and gradually began to carve out a new discipline in American education. They broadened the critical spectrum to include the biographical and social conditions attending the creation of any cultural artifact, and rerouted the notion of individuality or genius toward a busy intersection where various historical forces converged.

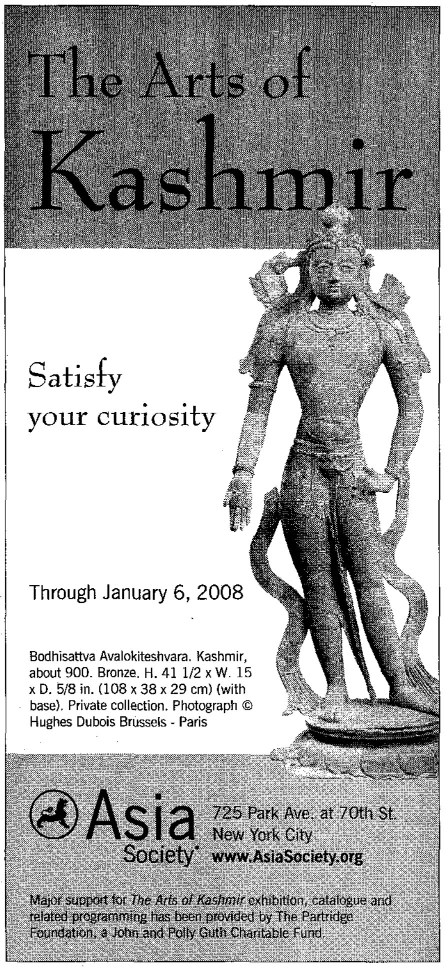
Barzun and Trilling, it could be said, also broadened each other. One day in the mid-nineteen-thirties, they began talking about novelists, and Barzun mentioned his admiration for Henry James. Trilling, who had read only a few of James's stories, replied that he thought him not much more than a "social twitterer." Barzun pressed upon him "The Pupil" and, as he recalls, "The Spoils of Poynton." Trilling was duly persuaded, and marched off to convince Phillip Rahv and William Phillips, the editors of *Partisan Review*, that James was a writer to be taken seriously—and within five or six years he was.

At the Colloquium, books and ideas were thrown open to discussion; almost every approach was tolerated. "Cultural criticism" was Barzun and Trilling's coinage for their lack of method, and it worked so well that, in the mid-fifties, Fred Friendly, an executive producer at CBS News, tried (and failed) to persuade the two men to offer a version of the Colloquium for television. "It was awe-inspiring," the historian Fritz Stern, a 1946 alumnus of the Colloquium, recalled recently. "There I was, listening to two men very different, yet brilliantly attuned to each other, spinning and refining their thoughts in front of us. And when they spoke about Wordsworth, or Balzac, or Burke, it was as if they'd *known* him. I couldn't imagine a better way to read the great masterpieces of modern European thought."

The class met on Wednesday evenings, and, as the decades passed and more specialized approaches to literature emerged, Barzun and Trilling remained committed to the essential messiness of culture. Neither the self-isolating



"I don't mind the tree huggers, but the tree humpers creep me out."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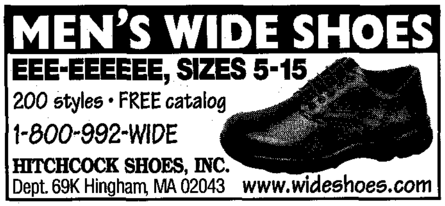
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pieties of the New Critics, nor the technical proficiency of the Russian Formalists, nor the class-bound shibboleths of Marxist writers held sway in their classroom. As a result, they were condemned, as Barzun recalled, "for overlooking the autonomy of the work of art and its inherent indifference to meaning; for ignoring the dialectic of history," not to mention "the 'rigorous' critical methods recently opened to those who could count metaphors, analyze themes, and trace myths."

Basically, Barzun and Trilling cast themselves in the Arnoldian mold of relating culture to conduct. Matthew Arnold believed that judging books "as to the influence which they are calculated to have upon the general culture" would help realize man's better nature and, thus, eventually improve society itself. Trilling and Barzun were less dreamy about the critic's power, but, like Arnold, they saw no fissure between moral and aesthetic intelligence. They interpreted books liberally and wrote about them with a fluency and a precision befitting R. P. Blackmur's definition of criticism as "the formal discourse of an amateur."

For all that, Barzun was never a "New York intellectual." He occasionally fraternized with the *Partisan Review* crowd, but he avoided the sectarian wars that seemed to fuel their lives and work; he appears only marginally in most accounts of the literary figures who rotated around the magazine. Yet, when a mid-century issue of *Time* came out with a lead article entitled "America and the Intellectual," it wasn't Edmund Wilson, or Lionel Trilling, or Sidney Hook, or Mark Van Doren whose likeness appeared on the cover (though all were mentioned inside); it was that of a man who hadn't even been born here.

Around 1941, Barzun took on a larger classroom, becoming the moderator of the CBS radio program "Invitation to Learning," which aired on Sunday mornings and featured four or five intellectual lights discussing books. From commenting on books, it was, apparently, a short step to selling them. In 1951, Barzun, Trilling, and W. H. Auden started up the Readers' Subscription Book Club, writing monthly appreciations of books that they thought the public would benefit from reading. The club lasted for eleven years, partly on the strength of the recommended books, which ranged from Kenneth Grahame's "The Wind in the Willows" to Hannah Arendt's "The Human Condition," and partly on the strength of the editors' reputations.

Barzun's public reputation had been made with the appearance of "Romanticism and the Modern Ego" (1943), which defied prevailing opinion by arguing that the difference between the ostensibly unruly Romantic movement and the ostensibly neoclassical Enlightenment was fundamentally social and political, not aesthetic. "The Romanticists' point was in fact not an emotional point at all," Barzun claimed, "but an intellectual point about the emotional life of man." It was a bold statement to make at a time when Eliot's condescensions to the early-nineteenth-century poets dominated literature departments, and perhaps it took a historian to recognize that Eliot's distrust of personality and radicalism caused him to misjudge the Romantics' debt to, among others, Rousseau and Kant. As Barzun laid it out, Romanticism was no aberrant aesthetic movement but reflected an intellectual sensibility perfectly suited to a hectic and idealistic age. In short, he helped make Romanticism respectable.

Although Barzun's influence on literary studies is difficult to assess, there's little doubt about his role in the revival of Hector Berlioz. Barzun had heard Berlioz's "Rakoczy March" at a children's concert in Paris when he was four or five, and, nearly forty years later, when putting the finishing touches on his biography of the composer, he noticed that the French and German scores of "Roméo et Juliette" contained a small discrepancy. (The placing of mutes on the strings at one point in the Love Scene was different.) He happened to mention this to Toscanini's assistant, and a few days later he was having tea at Toscanini's house in Riverdale, discussing music in general and Berlioz's instrumentation and harmonics in particular.

Toscanini was one of a small number of musicians at mid-century who admired Berlioz. The rest of the music world, along with "conservatives, clerics, liberals and socialists," Barzun wrote,

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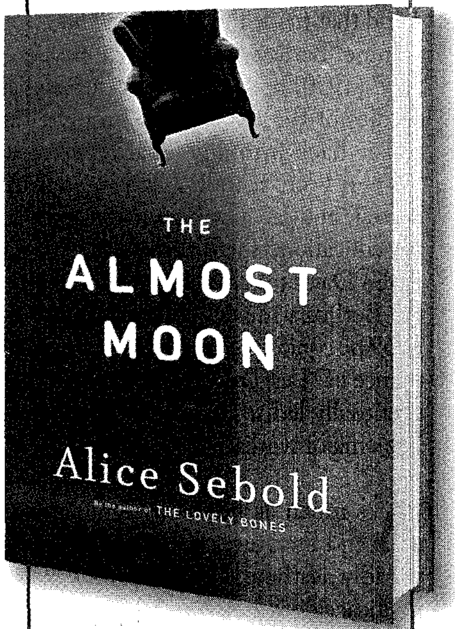

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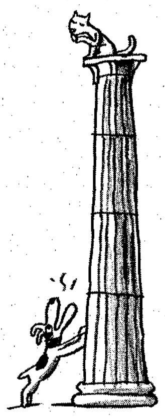
"all joined in repudiating" the Romantic style. But, where others heard in Berlioz disorder and bombast, Barzun discerned exuberance, vividness, and dramatic flair. When *he* listened to Berlioz, Barzun heard "Gothic cathedrals, the festivals of the Revolution, the antique grandeur of classic tragedy, the comic force of Molière and Beaumarchais, and the special lyricism of his own Romantic period." Barzun didn't just like Berlioz's music; he liked the mind that made the music, and his two-volume "Berlioz and the Romantic Century" (1950) not only spurred revisionist studies of Berlioz but also brought his music back into a general repertoire. "When I left school, I had to educate myself, and Jacques Barzun was part of my education," the British conductor Sir Colin Davis told me. Davis had lobbied for Berlioz's music in England and in 1969 he conducted a magnificent performance of "Les Troyens" in London that eventually led to his recording all Berlioz's major works.

As much as he wrote about music and literature, Barzun was no unworldly aesthete, and his practical and political side was put to the test in 1958, when he assumed the inaugural post of provost and dean of faculties at Columbia. He remained provost for ten years and is generally credited with extricating the university from its financial and administrative woes. He also replaced the music played at graduation with the march from "Les Troyens." Barzun returned to teaching the history of Western civilization just as it was coming under attack by various Continental theorists, whose repudiation of hierarchical structures and determinate meaning challenged everything that Barzun believed in. In the nineteen-seventies and eighties, Barzun became a symbol of the Old Guard, a mandarin scholar futilely defending the works of dead white males. Even as late as 1990, he had a walk-on in Henry Louis Gates, Jr.,'s smart, hard-boiled spoof of the canon wars, dressed in evening clothes and packing a .38 Beretta, holding forth on standards and errors of usage.



In truth, Barzun looked the part of someone who embodied tradition. He stood a straight-up six feet two inches and wore clothes that, if not expensive, looked expensive on him. His hair was silver, his forehead high and broad, and his nose long and straight, with a slight dip at the end. He looked ambassadorial, and possessed an air of authority that had less to do with giving orders than with the expectation that he would be listened to. Carolyn Heilbrun, one of the first female professors in Columbia's English and Comparative Literature Department, remembers that she felt patronized by Trilling and other male faculty, but she wrote about Barzun almost reverently:

> No picture of him I have seen, whether rendered by a photographer or by an artist, captures either his physical or his inner qualities. Obvious to the mere observer or the frightened student were his aristocratic way of carrying himself, suggesting arrogance, his impeccable clothes, his neat hair, his studious, exact, but never hesitant speech, his formidable intelligence. I have known history students tempted for the first time in their lives to plagiarize a paper because they could not imagine themselves writing anything that would not affront his critical eye, let alone satisfy him.

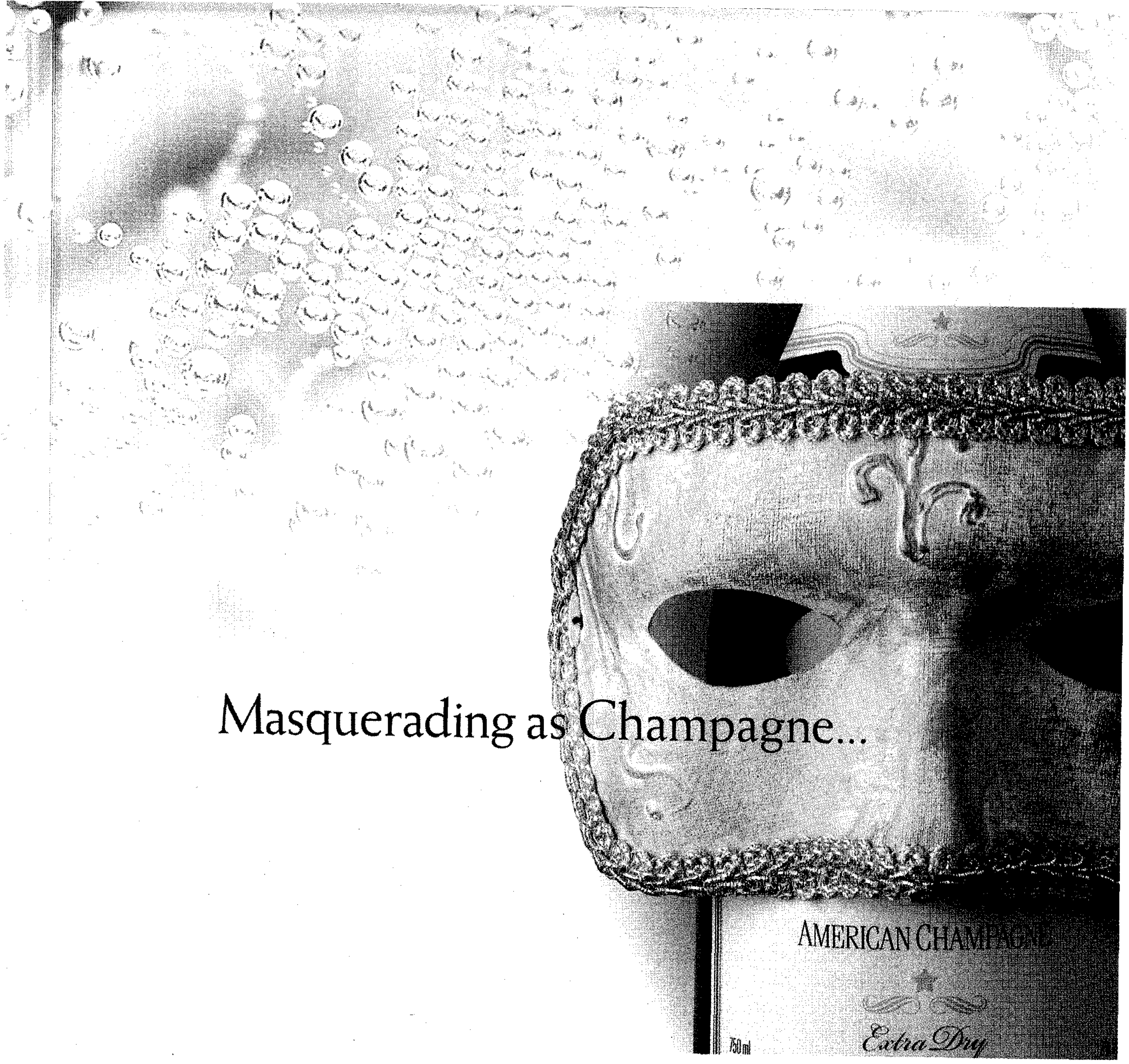
When I first encountered Jacques Barzun, in January of 1970, he was sixty-two and I was twenty-two. He was the University Professor of History at Columbia; I was a first-year graduate student in the English and Comparative Literature Department. He lived on upper Fifth Avenue; I lived in the Bronx, near Kingsbridge Avenue. He attended the opera; I hung out at revival movie theatres. He wore bespoke suits; I didn't own a suit. He said "potato"; I said "pot." Perhaps because we didn't really know each other (to me, he was just a name following the introduction to my Bantam edition of "Germinal"; to him, I was just another student in a green Army jacket who smoked filterless Camels), Barzun and I hit it off.

After I began to read his books, I noticed that the historian and the critic had distinctive voices. When Barzun is compressing great batches of information, his prose races across spatial and chronological vistas, delivering facts, their causes and implications, in a strictly utilitarian, almost rat-a-tat manner. When he's addressing an artist's work, however, the prose becomes redolent, more capacious, its syntactical flourishes a tacit reflection of real appreciation. Very few historians could so confidently gauge a writer's mind:

> Shaw knows at any moment, on any subject, what he thinks, what you will think, what others have thought, what all this thinking entails. . . . Shaw is perhaps the most consciously conscious mind that has ever thought—certainly the most conscious since Rousseau; which may be why both of them often create the same impression of insincerity amounting to charlatanism.

Not everything that Barzun wrote struck me with equal force, and some years later, when I edited a compilation of his essays, I made so bold as to tinker with his style. The editorial process led to a spate of letters, highlighting our asynchronous temperaments. During one exchange, I suggested that the importance of what he was saying warranted heightened language. His reply came so fast that I thought he'd bounded across Central Park and put the letter in my mailbox himself. "You are a sky-high highbrow," he wrote. "Me, I suspect highbrows (and low- and middle-) as I do all specialists, suspect them of making things too easy for themselves; and like women with a good figure who can afford to go braless, I go about brow-less." Undeterred, I offered to rewrite the passages in question. My changes were acknowledged with fitting tribute. "To put it in a nice, friendly, unprejudiced way," he responded, "your aim as shown in your rewritings of the 'objectionable' sentences strikes me as patronizing, smarmy, emetic!" My heart swells when I contemplate that exclamation point, as he seldom resorts to one.

Barzun doesn't often emote on paper and is even less inclined to do so in person. When you talk to people who know him, the same adjectives pop up: "composed," "distant," "removed," "reserved." It's not that friends find him cold or unhelpful; it's just that Barzun exudes a formality that inhibits the exchange of intimate confidences. He doesn't jabber. He won't gossip about his friends or discuss his marriages (there have been three) or family (he has three children). After all, what does any of this have to do with his work? When I raised the prospect of talking to him about his life, he sighed and said, "It's not a subject I'm interested in." Still, I thought, he must confide in *some* people. So I asked Shirley Hazzard, whose husband, the French



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scholar Francis Steegmuller, was in the same class as Barzun at Columbia, if Barzun had ever revealed anything about his private life to her. Her reply was almost a reprimand: "If you know Jacques, you know that he doesn't talk about those things."

And yet Barzun is not all genteel restraint, something that Sir Colin Davis touched on when we spoke about Barzun's appreciation of Berlioz: "Such an interesting figure, Berlioz—so intelligent and self-conscious, but also volatile and passionate. I rather think Jacques is like that—his *internal* life, I mean, not his personal life." Barzun's prose may not give off much heat, but over and over one finds paeans to pure feeling, to the sensuous response to experience. Like William James (his favorite philosopher), Barzun believes that feeling is at the root of all philosophy and art. "The greatest artists have never been men of taste," Barzun wrote, with Berlioz in mind. "By never sophisticating their instincts they have never lost the awareness of the great simplicities, which they relish both from appetite and from the challenge these offer to skill in competition with popular art." Because Barzun is so coolly analytical in his own work, one might infer that he would be drawn to poets of fine discrimination, to ingenious symbolists like Mallarmé and Valéry, and yet it's the rude vitality of Molière and Hugo that engages him.

Obvious emotionalism is not the point; it's the courage to be emotional that matters. Barzun has observed that "the vulgarity of mankind," in the sense of the common man's intense awareness of life—life with all its brief pleasures and bruising shocks—"is not only a source of art but the ultimate one." It's easy enough to understand why people don't immediately see this side of Barzun, and pass over, without notice, sentiments such as "And when will art cease to be something so exclusively for nice people?" or "Reading history remakes the mind by feeding primitive pleasure in story."

Barzun always seemed to know everything you had ever read or thought about reading one day, and he seemed just as comfortable talking about German architecture as about Venetian politics. "He was terrifying," Steven Marcus, a former dean of Columbia College, recalled about the experience of being his student. "He would disgorge an absolutely enormous amount of information during his lectures, more than anyone could possibly remember, and what you felt was—you felt you couldn't compete. I mean, you could imagine maybe one day writing something on the order of Trilling—maybe. But how could you ever know as much as Barzun did?" The charge against Barzun, accordingly, was that he spread himself too thin. As Marcus explained, "I think his natural reserve and the variegated subject matter have caused him to be taken less seriously by the intellectual crowd that runs literature departments and literary quarterlies."

Barzun, though, never intended to write for that crowd. Instead, as he put it in a letter to me, he wanted "to write for a quite different, less homogeneous group: academics in other departments than English, people with a non-professional interest in the arts (doctors who play music, lawyers who read philosophy) and a certain number of men and women in business and philanthropy, in foundations and newspapers or publishing houses." In writing for a general audience, Barzun was taking sides in an old debate about the relationship between the intellectual writer and the reading public. It was a question not of how much the reading public could bear but of who constituted that public. When Dr. Johnson wrote, "I rejoice to concur with the common reader," he could count on that reader to actually read or hear about his rejoicing. He was speaking, after all, about a relatively small number of educated Brits who owned businesses or property and could afford to buy books. When Barzun began writing, the size and diversity of the reading public discouraged such assumptions.

Barzun wanted to do on the page what he did in the classroom: help the reader "carry in his head something more than the unexamined history of his own life," not because knowledge is inherently good or makes one a better person but because it fosters an independence of mind. The more one learns about the course of civilization, he believed, the more one can appreciate its achievements. After a while, if you learn enough, you can argue that, say, Shaw's mind more closely resembles Rousseau's than Voltaire's—and you may actually enjoy doing it. Consequently, there's nothing Hegelian, Heideggerian, or hermeneutic about his work; no nihilistic or existential angst livens things up. Nor does he proffer any grand theory or unifying design that would explain the past in the categorical manner of Spengler's organic cycle of regional growth and decay, or Braudel's emphasis on broad so-

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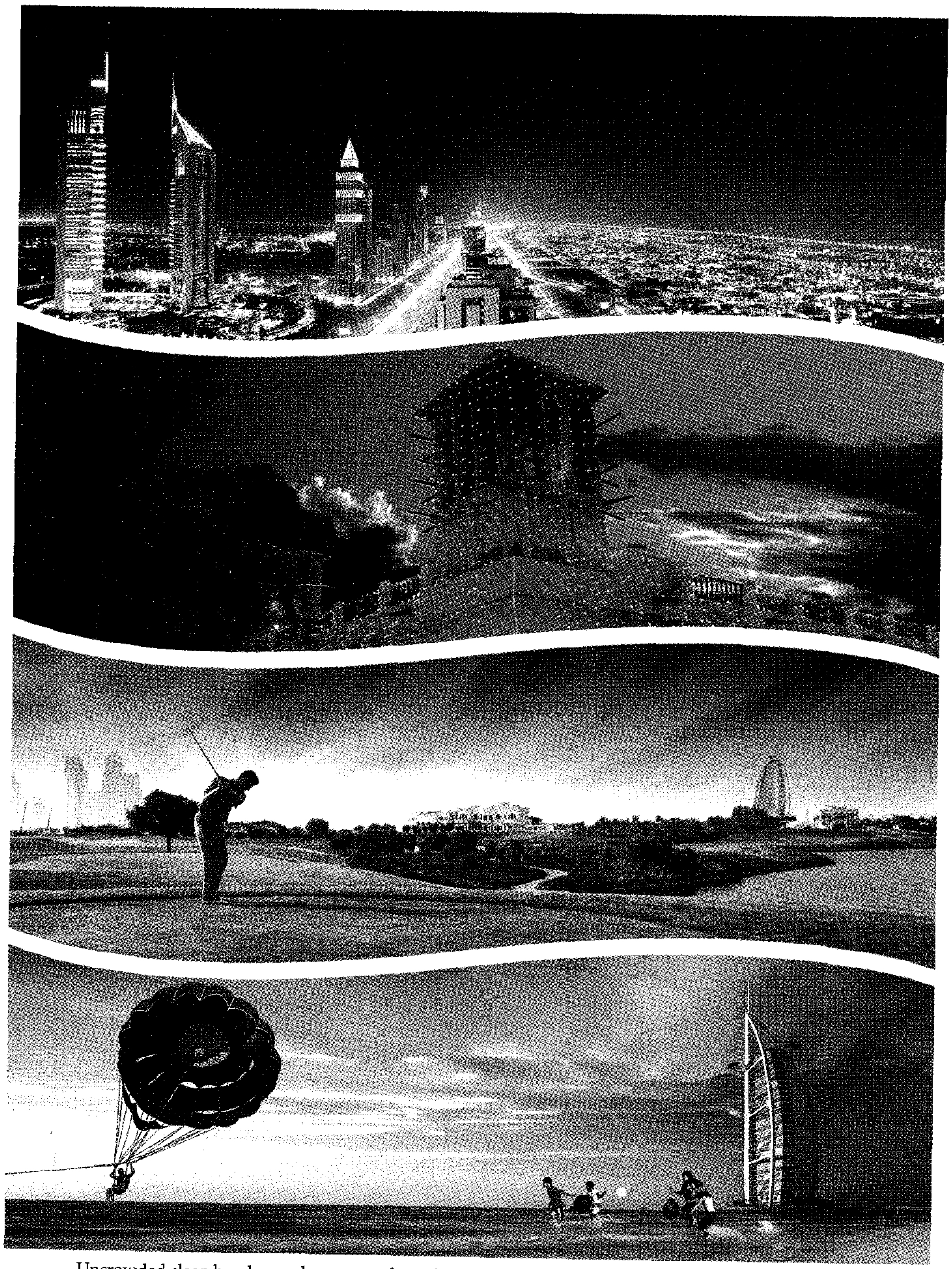

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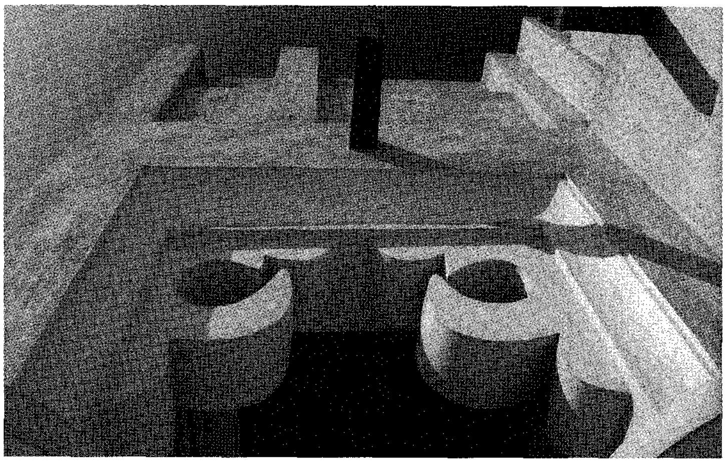
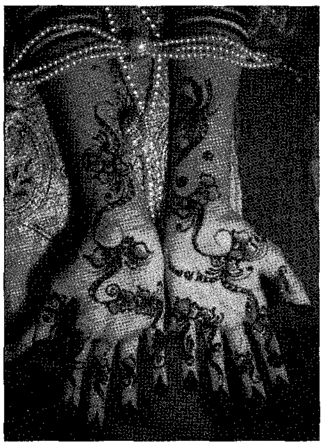
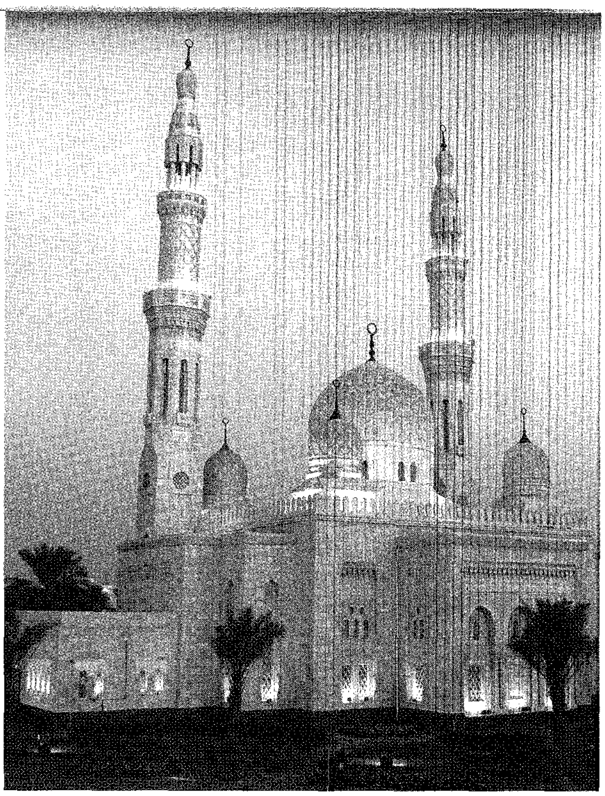


FUTURE WITH A PAST

Dubai's astounding growth over the last ten years has yielded a futuristic city-state with imaginative and unusual landmarks, from man-made islands in the shape of a map of the world, to Dubailand, a massive theme-park development. Yet Dubai's new incarnation as an avant-garde frontier has only made its history all the more intriguing.

Built in approximately 1787, **Al Fahidi Fort** has served as a palace, a garrison, and a prison. It now houses the **Dubai Museum**, where lifelike dioramas creatively depict everyday scenes prior to the oil boom of the nineteen-seventies. Among them are a bride preparing for her wedding, a nineteen-fifties souk, and a comprehensive exhibition on pearl-diving.





Interactive experiences are the focus of the **Sheikh Mohammed Centre for Cultural Understanding**, which offers Arabic language courses, lectures on Islam, and guided tours of local homes and places of worship. One of the most popular is the exclusive tour of the **Jumeirah Mosque**, which suspends its non-Muslim restriction only for this tour. This exquisite example of modern Islamic architecture has a creamy-pink stone façade, making it especially alluring at night.

At the **Heritage and Diving Village** on the Creek (which geographically divides Dubai in two), most of the activity centers on the small **Bedouin Village**, where elderly women dressed in traditional clothes can be seen weaving, preparing *qahwa* (Arabic coffee), *labnah* (cheese), and milking cows and sheep outside their tents. A peek inside reveals a typical Bedouin household, complete with wooden furniture, a hand fan made from a date palm, and a handcrafted cradle.

During the holy month of **Ramadan** (the ninth month on the Islamic calendar that begins on September 12th), Muslims fast from dawn till dusk, abstaining from food, drink, smoking, and chewing gum. (Non-Muslims aren't required to observe the holy holiday restrictions, but should refrain from eating or drinking in public during this period.) In spite of the Muslim fasting ritual, this is a festive, family-focused time. After the fast is broken with the call to the *Al Maghrib* (sunset prayer), long evenings are spent socializing, and many hotels have Ramadan tents, where visitors can be part of the hospitable dining experience.

Walking tours are one of the most memorable ways to explore the area. The Dubai City Tour winds through old and new neighborhoods, while Dubai By Night takes in the palaces, mosques, and souks of the city by evening light. Numerous other tours are available, spotlighting everything from Al Ain to the so-called Pirate Coast.

CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT: ARCHITECTURAL DETAIL, DUBAI MUSEUM ©EXPLORER PUBLISHING/VICTOR ROMERO; JUMEIRAH MOSQUE ©JOSE FUSTE RAGA/CORBIS; BOTTOM: HENNA PAINTING COURTESY OF DUBAI TOURISM

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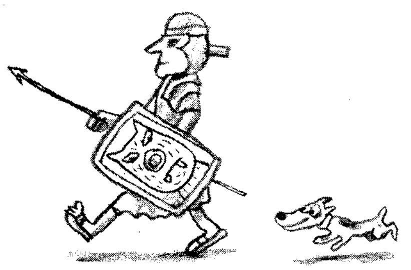
cioeconomic "structures." For Barzun, these systematic models of cause and effect run counter to the temper of history, which is intuitive, concrete, beholden to time and evidence:

> History, like a vast river, propels logs, vegetation, rafts, and debris; it is full of live and dead things, some destined for resurrection; it mingles many waters and holds in solution invisible substances stolen from distant soils. Anything may become part of it; that is why it can be an image of the continuity of mankind. And it is also why some of its freight turns up again in the social sciences: they were constructed out of the contents of history in the same way as houses in medieval Rome were made out of stones taken from the Coliseum. But the special sciences based on sorted facts cannot be mistaken for rivers flowing in time and full of persons and events. They are systems fashioned with concepts, numbers, and abstract relations. For history, the reward of eluding method is to escape abstraction.

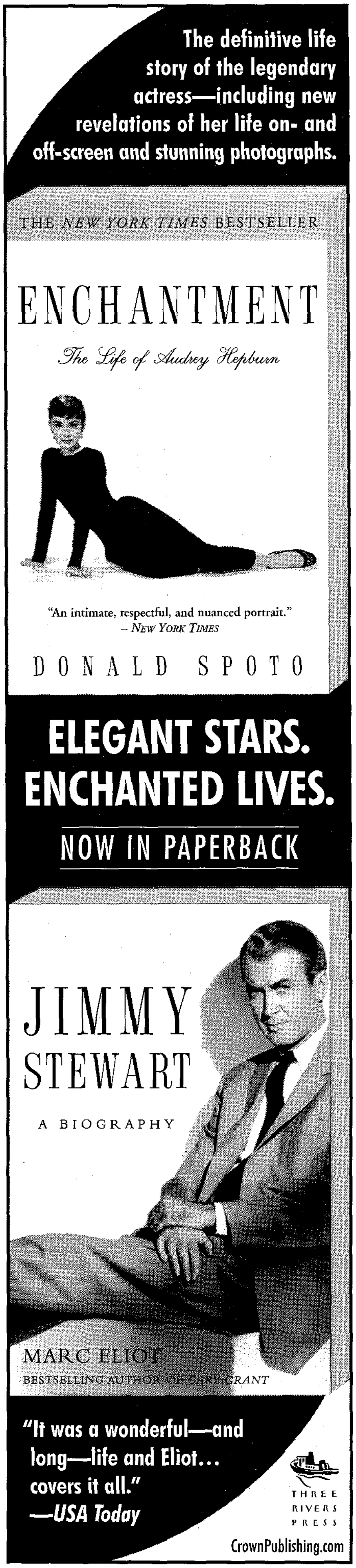
Barzun's approach to history is, in a word, pragmatic. He is temperamentally in tune with William James's self-assessment: "I am no lover of disorder, but fear to lose truth by the pretension to possess it entirely." Among the things that drew Barzun to James was James's conviction that every request made in good faith incurs some moral obligation in the claimant. A few weeks shy of his hundredth birthday, Barzun is still pressed to read manuscripts, give talks, and attend affairs in his honor. He tries to accommodate everyone, but there is simply less of him to go around. He's five inches shorter than he used to be, a decrease due to aging and spinal stenosis, which causes pain and numbness in the legs. He relies on a cane or a walker to get around, and, as one might expect, he is alert to the irony of aging: when time is short, old age takes up a lot of time. There are doctors' visits, tests to be suffered, results to wait for, ailments and medications to be studied—all distractions from the work. "Old age is like learning a new profession," he noted drily. "And not one of your own choosing."

Before I left San Antonio, Barzun called my attention to what he slyly referred to as his "most notable accomplishment." It was a book lying on a coffee table in the sunroom and titled "Introduction to Naval History: An Outline with Diagrams and Glossary." I turned it over in my hands and looked inside: it was, as promised, a point-by-point synopsis of seafaring events, designed for the education of naval officers. It turns out that, during the Second World War, the U.S. Navy commissioned Barzun, an associate professor at the time, to write it. And why not? It was always risky to assume that any topic was beyond Barzun's ken.



Shirley Hazzard learned this one evening, in the mid-nineteen-seventies, when she and Barzun found themselves standing in a storage room on East Seventy-ninth Street, up to their necks in books. They had been asked by the head librarian of the New York Society Library to help him weed out superfluous and out-of-date volumes. "There we were," Hazzard told me, raising her arm, "books stacked this high, and I thought, We're really in for it. We'll never get through these. Then Jacques reached into a pile, glanced at the title—it didn't matter which book it was—and said, 'This one's been superseded by another; this one is still valid; this one can stay until someone or somebody finishes his new study,' and in a couple of hours we were done. It was a very impressive performance, because, you know, he wasn't performing at all. It's just Jacques."

Sooner or later, all of Barzun's acquaintances experience their own "just Jacques" moment. Two years ago, while working on a piece for this magazine, I called Barzun to find out whether Lord Edward Grey, the British Foreign Secretary during the First World War, had said that the lights were going out all over Europe before hostilities had actually begun. Barzun asked if I was referring to him in my article as "Lord Grey." I said I was, since the attribution was always the same. Barzun cleared his throat. "Well, you know, he wasn't a lord when he said it. He didn't become Viscount of Fallodon until 1916." For the first time in thirty-odd years of conversation, I exclaimed, "Why would you know that?" He replied, mildly, "It's my business to know such things." ♦



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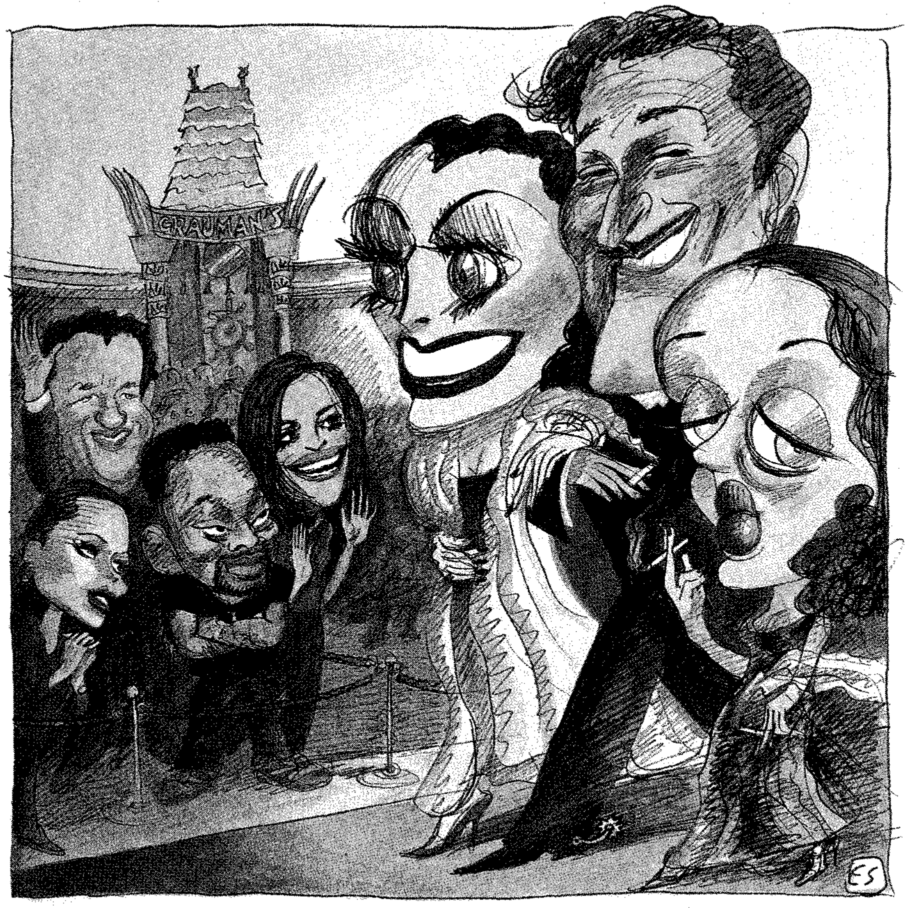
DEPT. OF POPULAR CULTURE

FALLEN IDOLS

Have stars lost their magic?

BY DAVID DENBY



An earlier generation of celebrities were loved without pride, envy, or chagrin.

Clark Gable, the most famous male movie star of the nineteen-thirties, drank heavily, hit the road and slept with prostitutes when he felt like it, had false teeth and bad breath, fathered an illegitimate child with Loretta Young, carried on an affair with Joan Crawford when they were both married, and, on at least two occasions, wrapped his car around a tree. He settled down somewhat when he fell in love with Carole Lombard, whom he married in 1939, and he apparently did not, as rumor has insisted, run over a female pedestrian when drunk. Over the years, however, he got into plenty of trouble, and almost all of it was kept out of the press or appeared in the papers in garbled and anodyne form. Louella O. Parsons and Hedda Hopper, in their syndicated newspaper columns, wrote benevolently of the stars except on those occasions when a star crossed one of them or the studios wanted an insubordinate actor publicly punished. There were famous Hollywood romances, of course, like Greta Garbo's with John Gilbert, and scandals, like the Fatty Arbuckle case, in 1921, and also an underground of terrific gossip, but, in general, newspapers and fan magazines published gently whimsical prose about romance and home life in the movie colony. The stars, it seemed, were *good.* They were helpful, kind, grateful for their enormous luck. Paired up and dressed in evening clothes, they went to clubs like Ciro's or the Mocambo, acting out studio-created liaisons, while their private lives, some-

EDWARD SOREL

times thrillingly wicked, sometimes sedate and ordinary, remained mostly out of sight.

Gable had a long-term contract with M-G-M, and if you were on M-G-M's payroll, and you messed up, you did not call your lawyer. You called Howard Strickling, the talented head of publicity and all-around fixer at the studio, or his colleague Eddie Mannix. Strickling's skills included bribing the police, arranging abortions, and shipping off to Europe directors who threw too many orgiastic parties. In 1932, when Jean Harlow's husband, the M-G-M staff producer and bigamist Paul Bern, was found shot dead in their Benedict Canyon house, Strickling arrived at the scene with Louis B. Mayer and Irving Thalberg, and worked hard, and successfully, to keep Harlow from making a court appearance. In those pre-Code days, M-G-M thought it fine to treat Harlow onscreen as a kind of snarling dirty girl, but it was another thing to have her tinged with crime in real life. (Bern may have been shot by his first wife, but the death was ruled a suicide.) The invaluable Strickling performed his role so well that he went to his grave, in 1982, with all his secrets intact—an outrageous affront to star biographers as well as to the merely curious.

But consider our daily bread in the new century. Think of Angelina and Jen seesawing on the fulcrum of Brad, who, over the years, has appeared with one or the other, clubbing, attending award ceremonies, shopping, vacationing—usually grinning slightly or looking a little lost. They date, marry, quarrel, break up, forgive; they deliver, adopt, and lug babies around, sometimes in dusty climes; they gain too much weight, lose too much weight, and so on, forever and ever. Some of what you hear about them may even be true, but all of it will be written or spoken in an abusively familiar style—chummy, coarse, knowing. The tone of the celebrity media is always junior high: "She's my best friend. I hate her."

Us Weekly, one of half a dozen identical celebrity magazines, includes, as a regular feature, a shop-and-schlep page called "Stars—They're Just Like US!," in which young actors are caught on the street hauling the baby in a Snugli or picking up the dry cleaning. Some of the other "stars" are mock celebrities, whose only work is to stone themselves silly and fall apart in public. The feature is lame, but the premise behind it is essential snark: every part of a star's existence, including the surgical scars and the cellulite deposits, belongs to the media—and to the public. The professional paparazzi have been joined by avid amateurs armed with digital cameras and Web uploads, waiting for a young actor to strip off his clothes on some secluded beach. Many of the young actors, male and female, can be seen naked on the Internet. In the past, a star like Rita Hayworth or Marilyn Monroe wore gravity-defying gowns—a negligee negligently hung, and so easy to remove—that offered the *promise* of nakedness. But the actuality of nakedness forces us to choose between prurience and priggishness. You can avoid this, I suppose, but only if you never watch television, turn on a computer, pass a newsstand, or talk to a teen-ager.

For the record, I don't think that moviegoers seventy years ago particularly needed "the truth" about Gable. Mary Gordon, in her recent biography, "Circling My Mother," recounts that Anna Gagliano Gordon, born in 1908, a hard-working woman who supported her family, "sat triumphant as a bride" when she heard that Gary Cooper had converted to Catholicism. Anna Gordon made the behavior of the stars a feature of her own moral life. Other fans, however, loved the stars in a simpler way—without pride or envy or chagrin. Stars, as John Lahr has said, were proof that the free-enterprise system worked—some schnook from nowhere got to the top, and wasn't that great? For those fans, much of the fantasy about stars was probably a self-amused daydream. Why disturb it? The phony press images of Strickling-era Hollywood seem harmless enough. Nor is the crude media usage of Brad and Angelina the stuff of tragedy; it's more like a joke gone sour from endless repetition. Still, the two extremes of protection and exposure suggest how thoroughly the magical aura around movie actors has vanished.

The shift from knowing nothing to knowing everything about a star's private life puts us in an awkward funk, since it's part of our relation to stars to dream of their onscreen characters and their life as in some way unitary. F. Scott Fitzgerald met William Powell at a party in the thirties and found him merely facetious rather than witty, but, even if true, we don't want to hear that—we want to think of Powell as the quintessence of suavity that he was in "The Thin Man." This imagined unity is one element that sets off a star from an actor, however accomplished. No one thought that Gable was a great actor, but, unshaven (in his early roles), belligerent, snarling or intimate, he was a remarkably imposing presence onscreen, and so was Crawford, though her vaunting egotism and coiffed suffering may look absurd to us. Are there many stars today like *that*—charismatic, indelibly idiosyncratic people, who transcend celebrity and mean something emotionally powerful to the audience? Are there even many stars in the industry's sense of a reliable big earner? Hollywood used to breed stars "like minks," as Pauline Kael said, but we may be breeding a different kind of animal now. And we may be losing some of the ridiculous pleasure—the longing and selfless adoration—that was once at the heart of moviegoing.

Let us not speak of the silent period. The stars are too far from us, too exotic in their jewels, chinchilla, and velvet, their slinky cars as long as boats, their barbaric aura of leopard-skin splendor. They played tramps (Charlie Chaplin), vamps (Theda Bara), sheikhs (Rudolph Valentino), waifs (Lillian Gish), flappers (Clara Bow), pirates and musketeers (Douglas Fairbanks), and other extravagant roles, and silence lent them the mystery of remote beauty. As youthful gods—the working metaphor for them at the time—they married one another or minor royalty and, in Beverly Hills or Bel Air, built enormous houses in innocently promiscuous Greco-Roman-Tuscan-Spanish style. Gathering together around the marbled swimming pools, or on yachts or polo fields, they enjoyed a kind of sanctified public leisure, relaxing and playing for everyone. It was unthinkable that these people should have children. They burned bright and then were extinguished; in the public imagination, they could not reproduce. In Billy Wilder's "Sunset Boulevard," which was made in 1950, the sable past of the silent stars was already an object of amazement.

In the sound period, movies became

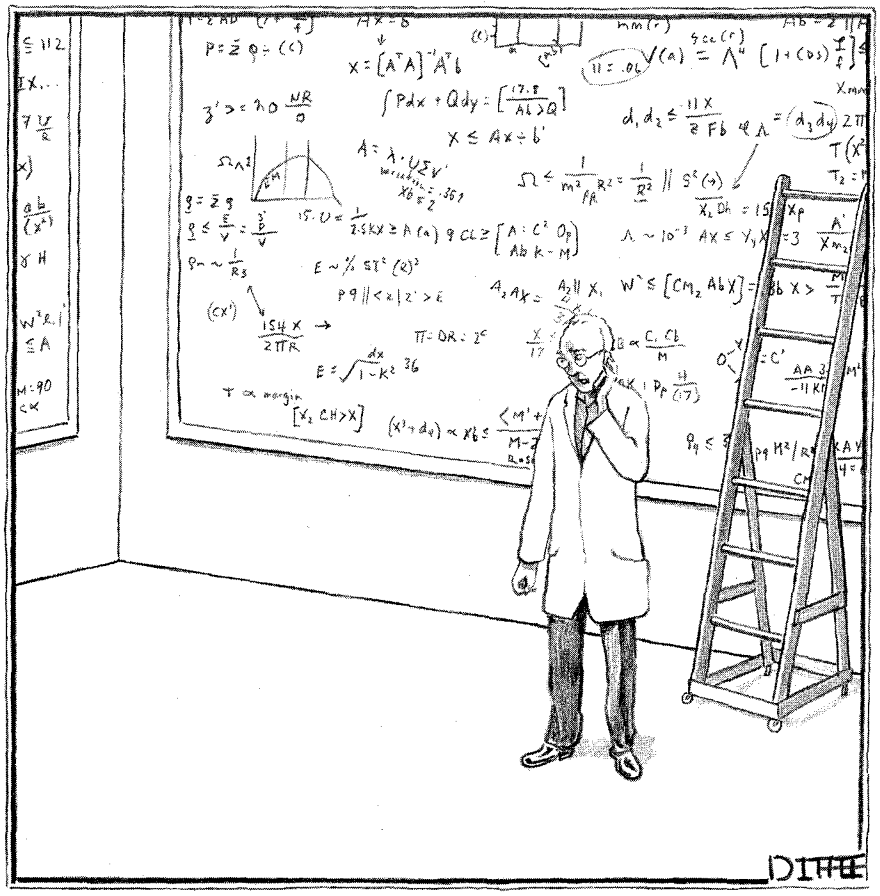
more realistic, more "psychological" and down to earth, and such renewable resources as Gable, Cooper, James Stewart, John Wayne, Humphrey Bogart, Crawford, Bette Davis, Katharine Hepburn, Ava Gardner, and Rita Hayworth never became objects of distant awe or condescending nostalgia; for us, they're still alive. In an enormous new book of star lore, "The Star Machine," Jeanine Basinger, the film historian and longtime head of Wesleyan's film-studies program, keeps the people named above just out of sight. Eager to concentrate on the routine workings of the movie industry, when the results may have been merely serviceable, not immortal, she concentrates on the second tier of stars—the Tyrone Powers and Loretta Youngs and Greer Garsons. Large and small, the stars were part of a balanced ecology in the great terra firma of the studio. Basinger plots their genesis and rise; she glories in their sheer staying power as proof of the system's strength, even if much of what they appeared in now seems mediocre.

Basinger is one of those film historians who are half in love with what might be called the Studio System as Rational Paradise. From the introduction of sound, in 1927, to the late forties, just about everyone was on contract to these giant, tentacular organizations. There were variations, of course, and special cases and even a few rebels, but most producers, directors, writers, actors, set designers, cinematographers, composers, sound recordists, and others were loyal employees reporting to work on a regular basis. Films were generally shot quickly, on studio sets and back lots, and genres like urban-crime pictures and musicals flourished on the reusable boards. It was, as many people have said, a factory process, and one that wasted far less money than Hollywood does now. The method turned out forty or so pictures a year at M-G-M and Paramount and Warners, which, in a stunning instance of vertical monopoly, also owned distribution wings and theatre chains.

Basinger nestles with almost delicious comfort into the intimate procedures of star manufacture. The story is familiar, yet still startling as an example of the industrialization of the ineffable. Initially, the actors came from everywhere and nowhere—from theatre in all its varieties (from vaudeville and the circus as well as from Broadway and night clubs), from hard-calloused jobs and bumming around, from soda-fountain counters, from the recommendations of talent scouts, who attended plays and local beauty contests. If you had some sort of promise, or just looked good and played ball with the scout, you would be invited to Los Angeles, photographed, screen-tested, and then, in many cases, worked on—teeth straightened, nose redone, freckles bleached, eyebrows plucked and redrawn. A mask of perfection was grafted onto natural good looks. You were given lessons in diction, acting, riding, dancing, fencing, and manners. At M-G-M, if you were a woman you had to do the "Metro walk"—a peculiar exercise that, as Basinger reconstructs it, required sucking in the stomach, squaring the shoulders, and stepping off with the right foot. Crawford's labored but imperious progress across a room offers the definitive version of it.

Having placed the refashioned young ideal in the Culver City or Burbank version of Louis XV's Deer Park, the studio exercised its rights. The actors were given walk-ons and small roles, then supporting roles, until the audience "discovered" them. Most of the contracts were for seven years, at a fixed rate of pay. The ones who became stars were expected to work forty weeks and to make three or four pictures every year; they could also be "loaned out" to other studios in return for favors or payments that didn't necessarily benefit them. If they refused a role, the time lost was added to the end of the contract period.

Who made it through the mill? Kael and others have asserted that the studios' notion of a beautiful woman—symmetrical features and a small nose—represented a Wasp stereotype, presumably the dream woman of the Jewish-immigrant studio moguls who wanted to assimilate, and who therefore put what they took to be American perfection on the screen. Norma Shearer, for example, Irving Thalberg's wife, was certainly such a genteel and Gentile ideal. But I think this interpretation is a little glib. There's simply too much variety on the surface: Joan Crawford was tense and ambitious, with arched, worried eyebrows; Clau-



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dette Colbert had large, almost Betty Boop-like features in a small face. Hepburn had pronounced cheekbones and nostrils that flared when she was enraged. Barbara Stanwyck's nose had something odd and character-defining about it.

What they all shared was large eyes with glistening whites. The video "Women in Film," on YouTube, morphs the faces of female stars, from the silent period to the present, in a continuous progression, making it clear that eyes may be freakishly pinned open (Crawford) or flirtatiously half closed (Marilyn Monroe), but they must be liquid and voluminous. And lips must be full, the lower gently crescented and the upper a perfect bow. The women were often filmed with chin raised, looking up at men, so the neck had to be a clean line, the shoulders pliant and yielding. Women's hair in the glamour period was curtain and foliage, the luxurious motif of sexual abandon; men's hair, whether gleaming and parted, like Cary Grant's, or a sensuous swirl, like Burt Lancaster's, was a force field. A male star also needed something contradictory or unresolved in his face, for without that he could never have been more than a model. Thick but not bushy eyebrows and a full, molded chin, preferably cleft, often matched up with a touch of "feminine" softness about the mouth (Cooper) or a sardonic fold in the eyelids (Bogart). Lighting, costume, and makeup sealed the mask of idealization. On the beach or in the sweaty Congo, the actress's hair and lipstick remained sprayed and painted. As the French sociologist Edgar Morin put it, Hollywood required the ideal in the midst of the real—a vibrant notion of character stamped onto a splendid physical emblem that hardly ever varied.

In movies, stars hold your attention just by being what they are; in their very existence on camera they express an immediately recognizable human possibility, a projection of personal power onto the world. Jessica Lange is, by any measure, a better actress than Lana Turner, yet Turner's Cora, in the 1946 version of James M. Cain's novel "The Postman Always Rings Twice," is a more arresting figure than Lange's Cora in the 1981 remake. Turner is so single-minded about sex and power that John Garfield, her co-star, can hardly breathe in her presence. An earlier version of a star overtaken by celebrity, Turner had an unfortunate tendency to marry men she hardly knew (seven of them) and to consort with gangsters. Her problems were too recurrent and numerous to be kept out of the press, but, as Basinger says, her bad-girl image fed into her movie roles. She was shrewd enough as an actress to draw on the sordid messes she had gone through in her life. She may have reached the outer limits of her talent early in her career, but her fascination onscreen remained.

Young film actors now often say that they don't want to be "typecast" the way many of the old stars were, but there's a lot to be said for typecasting. Among other things, it makes an easy, involuntary communion with a star possible for the audience. Not every actor hit that unmistakably readable identity right away. Notoriously, Cary Grant didn't become Cary Grant, or Bogart Bogart, until they had made more than twenty movies. It took Frank Capra's demotic genius to remold the standoffish Jean Arthur into a skeptical but ardent professional woman—a smart cookie with a gurgling voice—whom audiences fell in love with. At some point, however, an actor's looks and temperament would merge with a role that brought out, perhaps, an underlay of humor or menace, and the public would take notice, get excited, and the actor would become a star. The actor then imposed a unifying temperament on his characters; he became the characters, they became him, and any given performance offered a palimpsest of his past performances. Everything he had done since he assumed his "type" trailed him like a ghost. It's that larger-than-the-role mythic element that distinguishes a star (Cooper, Clint Eastwood) from someone who may be a much greater actor (Fredric March, Robert De Niro). Courageous as he is, De Niro has never pulled us toward himself; he remains his own man, not ours.

By today's standards, the old stars weren't paid very much—three, four, or seven thousand dollars a week, and they almost never got a share of a movie's profits. But these wage slaves were well looked after. The studio functioned for them as business manager, lawyer, publicist, doctor; as exercise room, sexual playpen, and probably a lot else. There's little reason to think that the stars picked up many checks. The smart ones invested in land or art and became rich. Yet the system of paternalistic domination was enraging to many. In 1938, Hepburn bought out her contract at R.K.O. rather than appear in a movie called "Mother Carey's Chickens," and later worked with M-G-M. Barbara Stanwyck, at various stages in her career, had nonexclusive contracts with three studios. Cagney walked out on Warners in 1936, formed a company with his brother, failed with the pictures he made independently, and came back to the studio. Bette Davis, often at odds with Jack Warner, also attempted to escape in 1936. She got reeled in after a court case, but she started working with the director William Wyler, got much better roles, and became a great actress as well as a star with such pictures as "The Letter" and "The Little Foxes." However unhappy, the stars who put up with the indignities and stayed in harness accomplished a lot, and gave moviegoers enormous pleasure, and who's to say that our pleasure doesn't matter as much as their independence?

The system persisted until 1944, when the seemingly mild Olivia de Havilland refused a role and balked at the notion that the time lost would be added to the end of her contract. Her agent, Lew Wasserman, then discovered an obscure California statute that held that a contract lasting longer than seven years amounted to slavery. When a California court ruled for de Havilland, the contract system began to crumble. In 1948, the courts forced the studios to divest themselves of their theatres. A couple of years later, James Stewart (again with the help of Wasserman) was negotiating profit participation on the Western "Winchester '73," and actors like Burt Lancaster and Kirk Douglas were beginning to form their own production companies. Servitude was over. The modern era had begun.

If the studio system, at its best, was a rational paradise ruled by philistine but occasionally benevolent tyrants, the current system, at its worst, is a semi-chaotic free market in which actors must find their way through a maze of extraordinary opportunities for honor and greed and all the variations in between. A few stars have multi-picture "relationships"

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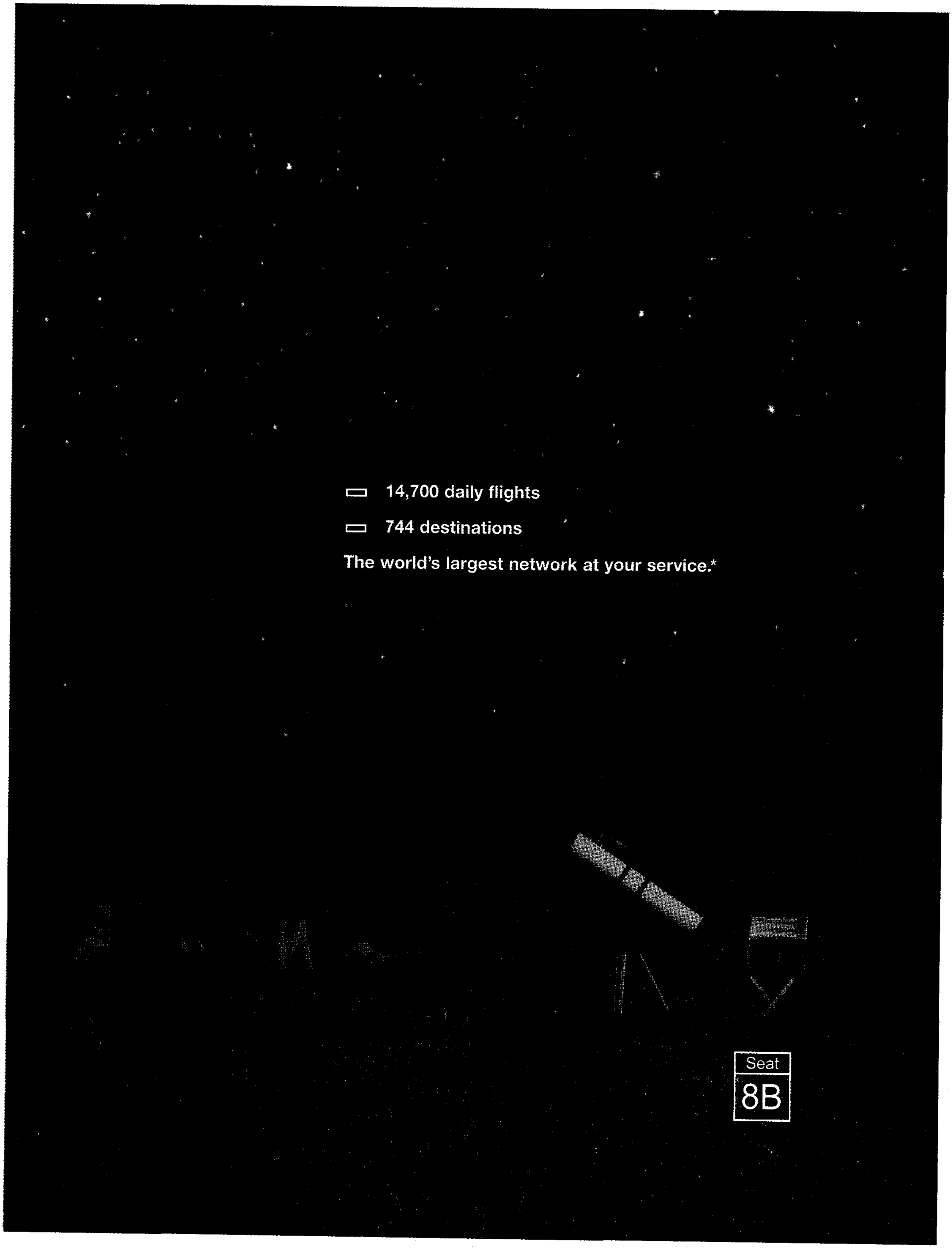
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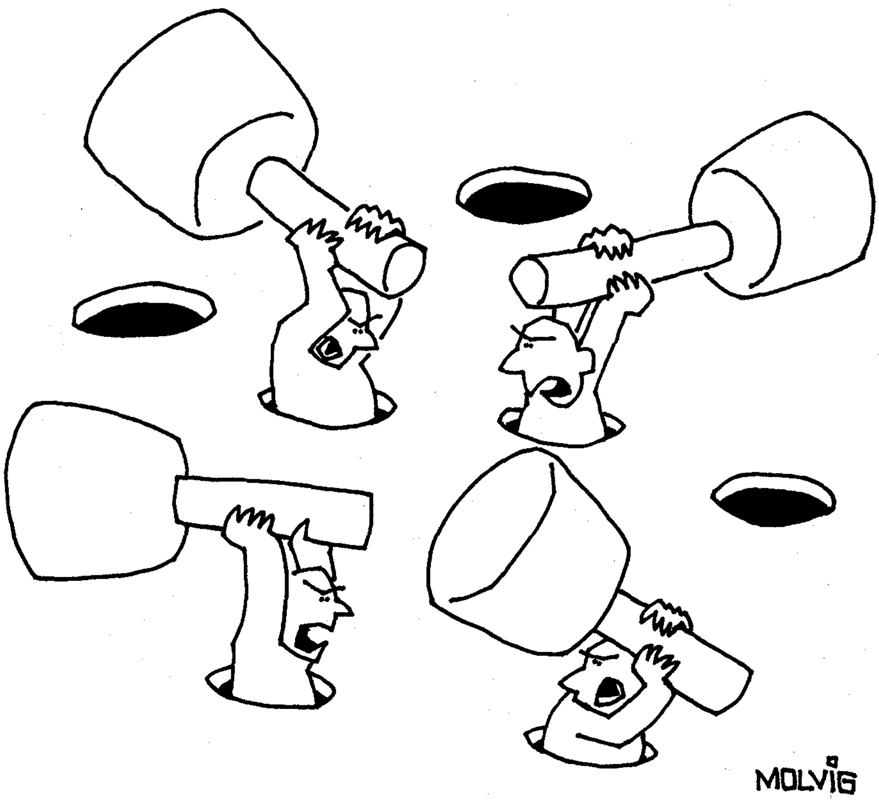

with studios, but most of them are freelance operators who "float," as Basinger puts it in her epilogue. They choose their own roles, working as often or as little as they like; their agents negotiate the fees, which may include profit participation as well as salary, and the competition to win the largest purse in town is fierce. Some of the stars form their own companies and develop their own properties; they are equally free to create interesting movies, to give in to their worst follies, or to keep screenwriters and other creative people waiting for years, only to cancel the project in the end. They exercise far greater control over their work, but each movie, begun from scratch, with technicians and members of the cast hired separately, takes much longer to launch and complete, and the enormous rise in production costs (more than sixty million dollars for a major studio film) has been jacked up, in part, by the staggering increases in what stars are able to demand and receive.

Yet just how much a highly paid star actually contributes to the success of a movie is not so easy to determine. From the industry point of view, Will Smith is the only actor in Hollywood who is guaranteed to "open" a movie—that is, to attract at least a forty-million-dollar domestic box-office gross in the first weekend. Smith earns his twenty-million-dollar fee. A charmer who can do action ("Independence Day"), comedy ("Men in Black"), romance ("Hitch"), and parenthood ("The Pursuit of Happyness"), Will Smith is a star by any definition. But Reese Witherspoon, who is receiving a reported twenty-nine million dollars to appear in a thriller, may be no more than a temporary monetary phenomenon, and no one is going to pay Chris Tucker the twenty-five million he got for "Rush Hour 3" if he stops rushing. The blockbuster system is at the center of the studios' hold on profitability, yet many of those films, it turns out, don't require stars. Among the thirty-five top-earning films of all time, measured by worldwide theatrical gross receipts (unadjusted for inflation), all but two ("Forrest Gump" and "The Da Vinci Code") can be classified as spectacle, fantasy, or animation. In these movies, stars are reduced to burbling voices, or get shoved aside by scaly creatures, digital convulsions, or magical columns of light. There were no stars in "E.T." and only minor ones in the "Jurassic Park" cycle. The "Harry Potter" series has been staffed by the British theatre tradition, in all its glory, not by Hollywood. Harrison Ford wasn't a star when he appeared in "Star Wars," in 1977, nor was Tobey Maguire at the time of the first "Spider-Man," in 2002. The "concept" for a big movie, or its special effects, may be the true star.

But a franchise can certainly propel an actor into stardom: Johnny Depp, say, after his flirtatious, kohl-eyed, twin-bearded turn in the "Pirates of the Caribbean" series; or Matt Damon, who has given his nearly wordless role as Jason Bourne an increasing soulfulness, and whose movies, a recent *Forbes* study revealed, earn twenty-nine dollars from DVD sales and theatrical grosses for every dollar paid him in salary, the highest ratio for any actor. These two—along with Tom Hanks, Tom Cruise, George Clooney, and Leonardo DiCaprio—can now do something that was unimaginable in 1935: they can appear in high-budget movies but also in small, intense, off-center films in which they can play sex addicts or losers or anything else that stretches their skills and possibly wins them awards. They are stars who can even fail a few times (in commercial terms) without losing their standing. "It's a nice life," a top studio executive said to me ruefully, sounding licked.

Tom Cruise got to this point the old way: he had tiny and supporting roles, and then hit his type in movies like "Top Gun," "Rain Man," and "A Few Good Men," in which he played the same role over and over—a callow young man who has the stuff, the drive, but lacks character. In the course of the movie, he would grow up; he would acquire ethics. Cruise was never an interesting actor, but he parlayed pure energy and a triumphant sense of his own emerging powers, re-created in each movie, into stardom. But for such handsome and ambitious young actors as Colin Farrell, Josh Hartnett, Ewan McGregor, Jude Law, and Orlando Bloom the way may now be blocked. Seventy years ago, these actors would have been tested in a variety of small roles or in B movies—tested to see both whether they could act and whether the audience perked up when they came onscreen. They would have been allowed to grow slowly. Now they are thrown into big roles in expensive movies, and they're forced to overdraw on themselves before their temperament has found the right shape. They don't know the camera yet, and the camera doesn't always find much in their faces. Blank-eyed beauty in men creates little but audience contempt. Having failed to become stars, they've been trashed by the media, but they may re-create themselves as actors in smaller films.

In any given period, American culture falls in love with certain kinds of stories and an array of scintillating temperaments that operate freely within those stories. Sixty years ago, an actor like Clark Gable or Robert Mitchum could be brazenly sexual onscreen; now the relentless womanizer appears only in farce, as a fool to be brought down. But some of the old male character types are still alive. Johnny Depp in "Pirates" is unbuckling Errol Flynn's swash, Matt Damon looks like a more wide-ranging Steve McQueen, and George Clooney, who is developing a talent for restrained pathos, is the obvious heir to Bogart's existential-outsider-with-heart roles.

Women, however, are often stepping into fresh territory; they have to, because the old territory has disappeared, and star-making stories are hard to find. Consider that Bette Davis, among other things, did the following: betrayed her lover and died ("Of Human Bondage"); got a brain tumor, went blind, and died ("Dark Victory"); wore a red dress rather than a virginal white one in antebellum New Orleans, was humiliated, and begged Henry Fonda's forgiveness before *he* died ("Jezebel"); renounced her lover and took care of his daughter ("Now, Voyager"); and brought up another woman's baby ("The Great Lie"). Suffering, renunciation, punishment, and the shuffling of babies played a big part in Davis's career. I intend no mockery: those were all juicy roles (and "Jezebel," at least, is a great film), and Davis brought to them her flashing eyes and scalding voice, her mastery of movement and emotional detail, her willingness to be unlikable; she was a truly great and daring movie actress. But the women's movement and changes of taste in sentiment have ruled out such roles; they now seem reactionary, or embarrassing kitsch. They no longer make us cry, and can be done only in semi-camp style on "Desperate Housewives." The thick, dreamy sensuality of a Lana Turner or a Rita Hayworth may be offered, on a smaller scale, by the diminutive but fleshy Scarlett Johansson, but when Johansson pouts and flirts her way through a picture she seems like a willing anachronism—a male director's delectable toy.

These days, a woman can be selfless but not self-sacrificing; she can be injured but not helpless. If she's hurt by a man, she takes revenge. Jodie Foster, Ashley Judd, and Charlize Theron have played role after role in which they're pushed too far and pull out the knives. Female violence is some sort of step forward in the pop-culture image of women, I guess, but, for an actress, denying so many parts of her temperament in order to be tough all the time may not be much of a gain. The old softness is taboo, but the new hardness may be a trap—a form of exploitation that merely feeds the public's hunger for violent movies. (The male public, I would guess. It was men, not women, who were excited by Uma Thurman slicing up thirty stooges in "Kill Bill.") In all, the way for women isn't easy: they often play no more than a decorative part in the fantasy movies that appeal to young and family audiences and clobber the competition on opening weekends. The innumerable broad comedies for young audiences have created a raft of star buffoons (Vince Vaughn, Adam Sandler, Will Ferrell, Ben Stiller, Owen Wilson, Luke Wilson, Jim Carrey, Matthew McConaughey, and maybe the Judd Apatow gang), but matching up with them, playing nice girls, are minor actresses, like Drew Barrymore and Kate Hudson, who don't make jokes and can't become stars. Téa Leoni, by contrast, has star potential. She's not a clown but an elegant comedienne with the talent and wildness of Carole Lombard; watching her try to act with the drawling, dragging, sheepish Adam Sandler in the unfortunate "Spanglish" was a painful experience. So the new freedom is limited. A wonderful actress like Laura Linney, working at the mid-budget levels, can play anything, but her roles don't exist in the big-budget movies that would make her a star. The opening-weekend madness has made women less "bankable" than men.

Julia Roberts, just now turning forty, is perhaps the last old-fashioned female star whom audiences want to see simply for herself—for her big easy carriage, her beautiful oversized features, her enormous smile that gives way to a racketing laugh. Audiences follow her through a

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continuous series of episodes in which Julia is now a prostitute who gets a wealthy businessman to fall in love with her ("Pretty Woman"), now a law student who teams up with Denzel Washington to stop terrible people from doing terrible things ("The Pelican Brief"), now a tough broad taking on a corrupt gas-and-electric company ("Erin Brockovich"). In all these roles, Roberts moves from point to point in the public narrative of her life. She's imposing without being regal, and the audience could both identify with her trials and aspire to be like her. Nicole Kidman, also elongated and lovely, with a libidinous smile and a play of mischief in her eyes, is a more ambitious actress, but Kidman's career suggests the perverse contradictions of freedom. With a truly valiant generosity, she has worked, at a fraction of her big-movie price, with a variety of young directors, but her choice of material hasn't matched her courage, and she has appeared in too many stinkers. She hasn't quite created a narrative of her life in public. Her mold is indistinct; she needs a mythmaking role to clinch her stardom.

The success of "The Devil Wears Prada" should have indicated to Hollywood at least one way of creating roles that both young and older actresses can *play*. Out in the world, women work hard. They have fights with their rivals, they have love affairs on the job, they commit or prevent crimes in corporate boardrooms, they get morally compromised or fired or promoted. Why not unleash Roberts and Kidman, or Cate Blanchett, with her pale-fire intensity, or Charlize Theron, Kate Winslet, or the avid Rachel McAdams into the morally complicated corporate, financial, and political worlds, where they can misbehave or have a ball and, in the process, fight their way to new or fresh stardom?

Of course movie stars still exist. What is the ungovernable Russell Crowe, if not a star? He's like King Kong breaking his chains. But there are fewer stars than in the past, and they have come down in the world. They are paid more but valued less. Manners, dress, and language have lost what was left of formality—expensive casual is the aspiration for stars and everyone else. Sharon Stone was the last star to carry herself grandly in public like Crawford, but she couldn't find roles equal to her pretensions. Even before the celebrity machine made stars "the same as us," many of them were learning to cultivate modesty. Henry Fonda and James Stewart were reserved, even dignified, in public. But stars like Tom Hanks—princes of the democratic realm—are downright friendly; they don't want to lord it over us lest we knock them off their low-rise pedestal. In some ways, movie stars now have a lesser hold on the public's imagination than the actors creating sustained characters in TV series or the athletes and rappers who are closer to profane liberty—the full freedom of the body in violence or beauty.

Movie stars are shop-soiled gods. Yet it's impossible to say goodbye to them without saying goodbye to a part of ourselves. Stars figured in the erotic life of the urban poet Frank O'Hara, who, sitting in a theatre, insisted that "the blood in my pants mounts to the stars/as I ponder the silver square." At the movies, loneliness in the anonymous crowd liberates fantasy and a sense of possession. Manuel Puig's 1976 novel "Kiss of the Spider Woman" was made into a movie in 1985 in which the hero, Molina (William Hurt), a gay window-dresser in a South American prison, brings solace to his cellmate, a stern Marxist revolutionary (Raul Julia), by telling him the story of a forties-kitsch film, which we then see—Sonia Braga plays a French chanteuse who falls in love with a Nazi. The same year, Woody Allen made "The Purple Rose of Cairo," in which Mia Farrow, a dreamy unemployed waitress and a lonely wife in Depression-era New Jersey, goes to the same movie over and over until, finally, one of the characters (Jeff Daniels) steps down from the frame and enters her life; he turns out to be real sweet. Both these fables, responses to feelings of entrapment, are about a relation to a movie star so intense that the boundaries between the screen and the moviegoer collapse. Growing up, as Puig did, in the Argentinean sticks (where Hayworth wasn't just a beautiful woman but a ray of hope) or waiting out the American Depression was tough. The movies kept people alive. By 1985, a more prosperous time, we were already engaging in nostalgia for nostalgia. Now it may seem past time to give up on star-worship altogether.

Certainly it would seem a virtuous renunciation. American movie acting, in both small and large movies, has never been better than at the present moment. Some of the smart young actors seem to be hesitating at the threshold of stardom, and their reluctance suggests that the celebrity racket has made their lives hell. For us, however, virtue is its own reward in life, not in a movie theatre. Star-worship transcends movie technique and directorial prowess; it transcends art. It's the wicked or foolish indulgence that once made moviegoing a universal habit. Despite every discouragement, there's little to do but wait like suitors with hat in hand for the movies to produce a fresh round of stars so we can become fools all over again. ♦

PRESENTS

THE ART OF THE STORY

told by our parents. And as adults, those family members often become fodder for our own stories. At the Moth, where engaging storytellers each get ten minutes to spin their tale before a live audience, the best of the bunch often hit close to home. The following is the fifth in a series of adaptations to emerge from the Moth storytelling community.

a Russian immigrant's quasi-sentimental journey to the old country, sans map or memory. ▶

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Everyone Has a Story

A GRAVE PREDICAMENT

From The Moth's Best Mothers and Fathers Story Selections

BORIS TIMANOVSKY, who immigrated from Russia eighteen years ago, is today the vice president of an international software company. His first visit to The Moth was as an audience member a few years ago. "I immediately realized this was the creative outlet that I'd been looking for," says the storyteller, who has related about a dozen wryly personal tales to date and who last year won The Moth's GrandSLAM, a biannual competition showcasing ten of the city's most popular performers. The following is adapted from the transcript of a story that Timanovsky told live at The Moth.

Last summer, after sixteen years, I went to the city in Russia where I grew up. I went there on company business, but I also brought along a suitcase filled with secondhand clothes that my mom asked me to distribute among her relatives there. I was really the first in my family to go back after all those years.

She also gave me a hand-drawn map showing the location of my grandfather's grave site at the local cemetery. She asked me to go there. And when I was leaving she seemed to need reassurance: "Are you going to go there?" "Yes," I said. "Promise?" she asked. "I promise."

My grandfather died when I was very small ,and my mother wanted me to remember him. She would always tell me stories about him. I guess it was all a part of dealing with the loss. He was still very much alive in her mind, and she wanted him to continue to live in mine as well. But being too small when it all happened, I didn't remember much. I thought maybe this visit to his grave would make up for what she thought was her failure at keeping his memory alive.

> "I promised it'd be the first thing I'd do when I got to Russia. But the first thing I did was to locate my old high school girlfriend."

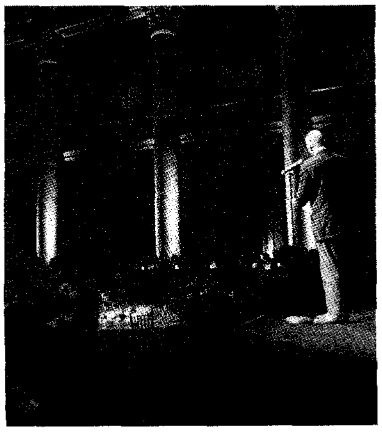
I promised that the first thing I'd do when I got to Russia would be to go to the cemetery. Well, the first thing I did when I got there was to locate my old high school girlfriend. I also got caught up in work, and had a lot of catching up to do with my childhood friends. So it wasn't until a day before I was leaving that I actually found time to go to the cemetery.

It was late in the afternoon, and right by the entrance of the cemetery was a woman who was selling flowers. By the time I got there that day, she had only seven carnations left in her bucket. I bought them all. But when I reached for my wallet, I realized I didn't have the map with me; I had no idea what happened to it. And I had no idea where my grandfather's grave was located.

I could call my mom and ask her, I thought. There was a pay phone right there. I still had ten or fifteen minutes left on my calling card and it was already morning in New York. But the problem was that I'd already told her I went to the cemetery. So what was I going to say? That I decided to go again but lost the map? She knows whom she's dealing with. She'd have seen right through it.

READ "A GRAVE PREDICAMENT" IN ITS ENTIRETY AT THEMOTH.ORG/ARTOFTHESTORY

TOP: TIMANOVSKY IMAGE ©DAVID POLENBERG; BELOW: COURTESY OF THE MOTH



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IMPORTANT SAFETY INFORMATION: LUNESTA works quickly, and should be taken right before bed. Be sure you have at least eight hours to devote to sleep before becoming active. Until you know how you'll react to prescription LUNESTA, you should not drive or operate machinery. Do not use alcohol while taking LUNESTA. Most sleep medicines carry some risk of dependency. Side effects may include unpleasant taste, headache, drowsiness and dizziness. See important patient information on the next page.

Lunesta™

(eszopiclone) CIV

1, 2 AND 3 MG TABLETS

Please read this summary of information about LUNESTA before you talk to your doctor or start using LUNESTA. It is not meant to take the place of your doctor's instructions. If you have any questions about LUNESTA tablets, be sure to ask your doctor or pharmacist.

LUNESTA is used to treat different types of sleep problems, such as difficulty in falling asleep, difficulty in maintaining sleep during the night, and waking up too early in the morning. Most people with insomnia have more than one of these problems. You should take LUNESTA immediately before going to bed because of the risk of falling.

LUNESTA belongs to a group of medicines known as "hypnotics" or, simply, sleep medicines. There are many different sleep medicines available to help people sleep better. Insomnia is often transient and intermittent. It usually requires treatment for only a short time, usually 7 to 10 days up to 2 weeks. If your insomnia does not improve after 7 to 10 days of treatment, see your doctor, because it may be a sign of an underlying condition. Some people have chronic sleep problems that may require more prolonged use of sleep medicine. However, you should not use these medicines for long periods without talking with your doctor about the risks and benefits of prolonged use.

Side Effects

All medicines have side effects. The most common side effects of sleep medicines are:

- Drowsiness
- Dizziness
- Lightheadedness
- Difficulty with coordination

Sleep medicines can make you sleepy during the day. How drowsy you feel depends upon how your body reacts to the medicine, which sleep medicine you are taking, and how large a dose your doctor has prescribed. Daytime drowsiness is best avoided by taking the lowest dose possible that will still help you sleep at night. Your doctor will work with you to find the dose of LUNESTA that is best for you. Some people taking LUNESTA have reported next-day sleepiness.

To manage these side effects while you are taking this medicine:

- When you first start taking LUNESTA or any other sleep medicine, until you know whether the medicine will still have some effect on you the next day, use extreme care while doing anything that requires complete alertness, such as driving a car, operating machinery, or piloting an aircraft.
- Do not drink alcohol when you are taking LUNESTA or any sleep medicine. Alcohol can increase the side effects of LUNESTA or any other sleep medicine.
- Do not take any other medicines without asking your doctor first. This includes medicines you can buy without a prescription. Some medicines can cause drowsiness and are best avoided while taking LUNESTA.
- Always take the exact dose of LUNESTA prescribed by your doctor. Never change your dose without talking to your doctor first.

Special Concerns

There are some special problems that may occur while taking sleep medicines.

Memory Problems

Sleep medicines may cause a special type of memory loss or "amnesia." When this occurs, a person may not remember what has happened for several hours after taking the medicine. This is usually not a problem since most people fall asleep after taking the medicine. Memory loss can be a problem, however, when sleep medicines are taken while traveling, such as during an airplane flight and the person wakes up before the effect of the medicine is gone. This has been called "traveler's amnesia." Memory problems have been reported rarely by patients taking LUNESTA in clinical studies. In most cases, memory problems can be avoided if you take LUNESTA only when you are able to get a full night of sleep before you need to be active again. Be sure to talk to your doctor if you think you are having memory problems.

Tolerance

When sleep medicines are used every night for more than a few weeks, they may lose their effectiveness in helping you sleep. This is known as "tolerance." Development of tolerance to LUNESTA was not observed in a clinical study of 6 months' duration. Insomnia is often transient and intermittent, and prolonged use of sleep medicines is generally not necessary. Some people, though, have chronic sleep problems that may require more prolonged use of sleep medicine. If your sleep problems continue, consult your doctor, who will determine whether other measures are needed to overcome your sleep problems.

Dependence

Sleep medicines can cause dependence in some people, especially when these medicines are used regularly for longer than a few weeks or at high doses. Dependence is the need to continue taking a medicine because stopping it is unpleasant.

When people develop dependence, stopping the medicine suddenly may cause unpleasant symptoms (see *Withdrawal* below). They may find they have to keep taking the medicine either at the prescribed dose or at increasing doses just to avoid withdrawal symptoms.

All people taking sleep medicines have some risk of becoming dependent on the medicine. However, people who have been dependent on alcohol or other drugs in the past may have a higher chance of becoming addicted to sleep medicines. This possibility must be considered before using these medicines for more than a few weeks. If you have been addicted to alcohol or drugs in the past, it is important to tell your doctor before starting LUNESTA or any sleep medicine.

Withdrawal

Withdrawal symptoms may occur when sleep medicines are stopped suddenly after being used daily for a long time. In some cases, these symptoms can occur even if the medicine has been used for only a week or two. In mild cases, withdrawal symptoms may include unpleasant feelings. In more severe cases, abdominal and muscle cramps, vomiting, sweating, shakiness, and, rarely, seizures may occur. These more severe withdrawal symptoms are very uncommon. Although withdrawal symptoms have not been observed in the relatively limited controlled trials experience with LUNESTA, there is, nevertheless, the risk of such events in association with the use of any sleep medicine.

Another problem that may occur when sleep medicines are stopped is known as "rebound insomnia." This means that a person may have more trouble sleeping the first few nights after the medicine is stopped than before starting the medicine. If you should experience rebound insomnia, do not get discouraged. This problem usually goes away on its own after 1 or 2 nights.

If you have been taking LUNESTA or any other sleep medicine for more than 1 or 2 weeks, do not stop taking it on your own. Always follow your doctor's directions.

Changes In Behavior And Thinking

Some people using sleep medicines have experienced unusual changes in their thinking and/or behavior. These effects are not common. However, they have included:

- More outgoing or aggressive behavior than normal
- Confusion
- Strange behavior
- Agitation
- Hallucinations
- Worsening of depression
- Suicidal thoughts

How often these effects occur depends on several factors, such as a person's general health, the use of other medicines, and which sleep medicine is being used. Clinical experience with LUNESTA suggests that it is rarely associated with these behavior changes.

It is also important to realize it is rarely clear whether these behavior changes are caused by the medicine, are caused by an illness, or have occurred on their own. In fact, sleep problems that do not improve may be due to illnesses that were present before the medicine was used. If you or your family notice any changes in your behavior, or if you have any unusual or disturbing thoughts, call your doctor immediately.

Pregnancy And Breastfeeding

Sleep medicines may cause sedation or other potential effects in the unborn baby when used during the last weeks of pregnancy. Be sure to tell your doctor if you are pregnant, if you are planning to become pregnant, or if you become pregnant while taking LUNESTA.

In addition, a very small amount of LUNESTA may be present in breast milk after use of the medication. The effects of very small amounts of LUNESTA on an infant are not known; therefore, as with all other prescription sleep medicines, it is recommended that you not take LUNESTA if you are breast-feeding a baby.

Safe Use Of Sleep Medicines

To ensure the safe and effective use of LUNESTA or any other sleep medicine, you should observe the following cautions:

1. LUNESTA is a prescription medicine and should be used ONLY as directed by your doctor. Follow your doctor's instructions about how to take, when to take, and how long to take LUNESTA.
2. Never use LUNESTA or any other sleep medicine for longer than directed by your doctor.
3. If you notice any unusual and/or disturbing thoughts or behavior during treatment with LUNESTA or any other sleep medicine, contact your doctor.
4. Tell your doctor about any medicines you may be taking, including medicines you may buy without a prescription and herbal preparations. You should also tell your doctor if you drink alcohol. DO NOT use alcohol while taking LUNESTA or any other sleep medicine.
5. Do not take LUNESTA unless you are able to get 8 or more hours of sleep before you must be active again.
6. Do not increase the prescribed dose of LUNESTA or any other sleep medicine unless instructed by your doctor.
7. When you first start taking LUNESTA or any other sleep medicine, until you know whether the medicine will still have some effect on you the next day, use extreme care while doing anything that requires complete alertness, such as driving a car, operating machinery, or piloting an aircraft.
8. Be aware that you may have more sleeping problems the first night or two after stopping any sleep medicine.
9. Be sure to tell your doctor if you are pregnant, if you are planning to become pregnant, if you become pregnant, or if you are breastfeeding a baby while taking LUNESTA.
10. As with all prescription medicines, never share LUNESTA or any other sleep medicine with anyone else. Always store LUNESTA or any other sleep medicine in the original container and out of reach of children.
11. Be sure to tell your doctor if you suffer from depression.
12. LUNESTA works very quickly. You should only take LUNESTA immediately before going to bed.
13. For LUNESTA to work best, you should not take it with or immediately after a high-fat, heavy meal.
14. Some people, such as older adults (i.e., ages 65 and over) and people with liver disease, should start with the lower dose (1 mg) of LUNESTA. Your doctor may choose to start therapy at 2 mg. In general, adults under age 65 should be treated with 2 or 3 mg.
15. Each tablet is a single dose; do not crush or break the tablet.

Note: This summary provides important information about LUNESTA. If you would like more information, ask your doctor or pharmacist to let you read the Prescribing Information and then discuss it with him or her.

Rx only

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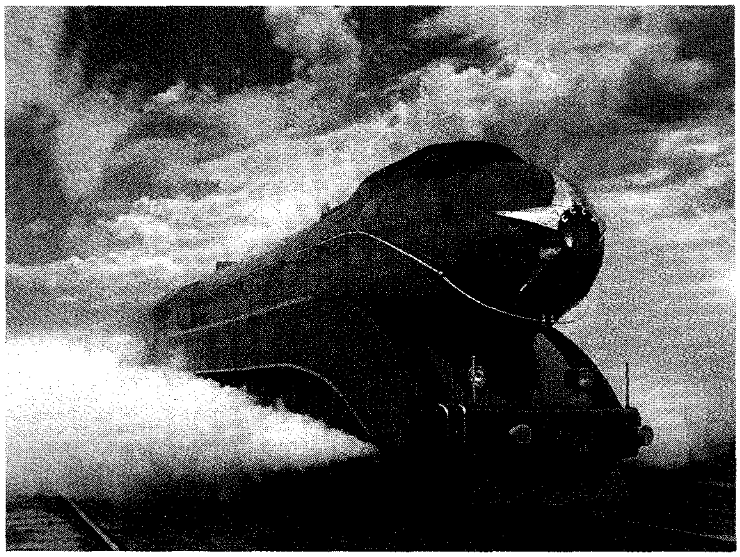
FICTION

AMONG ANIMALS AND PLANTS

BY ANDREI PLATONOV



ARKADY SHAIKHET, "EXPRESS" (1939)/NAILYA ALEXANDER GALLERY

In the gloom of nature, a man with a hunting rifle was walking through sparse forest. The hunter's face was a little pockmarked, but he was handsome and, for the time being, still young. At this time of year, a whiff of mist hung in the forest—from the warmth and moisture of the air, the breath of developing plants, and the decay of leaves that had perished long ago. It was difficult to see anything, but it was good to walk alone, to think without meaning, or to do the opposite—to stop thinking altogether and just droop. The forest grew on the slope of a low hill; large boulders lay between the small thin birches, and the soil was infertile and poor—clay here, gray earth there—but the trees and grass had got used to these conditions, and they lived in this land as best they could.

Sometimes the hunter would stop for a moment; then he would hear the many-voiced drone of the life of midges, small birds, worms, and ants, and the rustle of the lumps of earth that this population harried and shifted about, so as to feed itself and stay active. The forest was like a crowded city—not that the hunter had ever been to a city, but he had been trying to imagine one for a long time. Once, he had passed through Petrozavodsk, but even that had been only in passing. Screeches, squeaks, and a faint muttering filled the forest, perhaps indicating bliss and satisfaction, perhaps indicating that someone had perished. Moist birch leaves shone in the mist with the green inner light of their lives; invisible insects were rocking them in the steamy damp rising from the earth. Some far-off small animal began to whimper meekly in its hiding place; no one was doing it any harm there, but it was trembling from the fear of its own existence, not daring to surrender to its own heart's joy in the loveliness of the world, afraid to make use of the rare and brief chance of inadvertent life, because it might be discovered and eaten. But then the animal should not really even have been whimpering: predators might notice and devour it.

The whistle of a locomotive, thin, distant, shredded by the whirlwind of speed, sounded through the forest and the mist, like the plaintive voice of an exhausted running man. "The Polar Arrow!" the hunter said to himself. "What a distance it runs! There's music playing in the coaches. Clever people are travelling in them. They drink pink water from bottles, and they talk in conversations."

The hunter began to feel bored in the forest. He sat down beside a tree stump and held his rifle between his legs, ready to hand; he wanted to kill some animal or bird, whatever appeared. It enraged him that he didn't know science, that he didn't travel in trains with electricity, that he hadn't seen Lenin's mausoleum and had only once smelled a whiff of perfume, from a bottle that belonged to the wife of his boss, the director of Section 10. It was his lot to wander about in a misty forest, among insects, plants, and a general absence of culture, while luxurious trains hurtled into the distance. "Animal or bird—whatever shows up, I'll kill it!" the hunter resolved. But, as before, there was nothing around—only the rustle and hum of petty, frail creatures that weren't worth a battle. Beneath the hunter crawled diligent ants, burdened like respectable little people with heavy loads for their households. They are vile creatures, he thought, with the character of kulaks. They spend all their lives dragging goods into their kingdom; they exploit every solitary animal, big and small, that they can dominate; they know nothing of the universal common interest and live only for their own greedy, concentrated well-being. Once, the hunter had happened to see two ants dragging an iron filing from the railway line: it seems that ants even need iron. The hunter stamped on some of the nearest ants, then moved away, so as not to enrage himself further. He was like his father: his father also got angry whenever he went out hunting, waging war on the birds and the beasts as if they were ferocious enemies, expending every last bit of malice in his heart while he was in the forest, and then returning home a kind, sensitive family man. Other hunters weren't like this at all; they wandered tenderheartedly through the grass, killing animals with love and caressing flowers and trees with trembling pleasure, while at home, among people, they lived lives of irritation, longing to be back in nature, where they could feel that they were the ones in charge, thanks to their rifles.

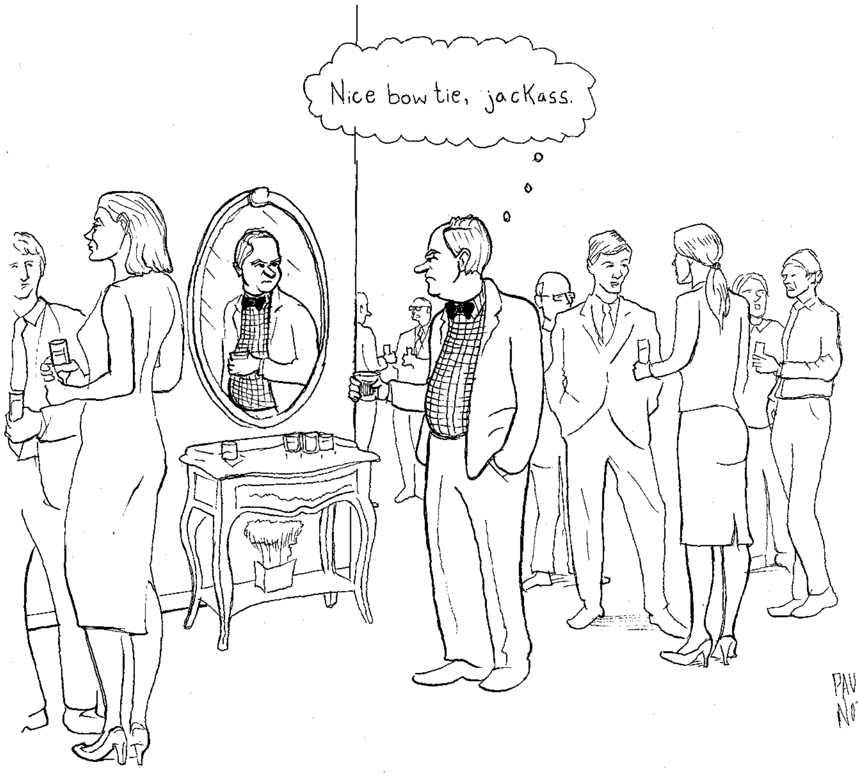
"A man hunts, Ivan Alekseyevich, either out of stupidity or out of poverty!" his father would say to him. (When Fyodorov reached the age of eighteen, his father had begun to call him by his name and patronymic.) "You know—a man sits by a lake with a rod, all on his own. The bastard hooks a worm onto a line and deceives some mindless creature that lives in the water, while another man takes his rifle and goes off into the forest. 'I don't need anyone,' he says. 'You carry on without me—I'll fend for myself. I'm all right on my own, thank you very much.' That man's friend is his dog, not you or me."

Fyodorov picked up his rifle. Something had stirred in the short grass nearby. He walked a little way in that direction and found a small hare—still a baby. He was sitting there almost humanly, rapidly chewing a blade of grass and using his tiny front paws to steady it. Then he wiped his face and began to take quick breaths of the clean, healthy air. Most likely, he was exhausted from having to find nourishment for himself; probably his parents were dead and he was living alone, an orphan. The hare did not notice the hunter, or did not understand his significance. He urinated, leaped up, and disappeared. Fyodorov didn't kill him; the hare was too small, almost useless as food, and it would have been a shame, because the hare was only a child, yet already a true worker. Let him go on breathing.

Soon afterward, Fyodorov came out into a clearing. The same chubby little baby hare was burrowing in the earth with his paws, trying to dig up some rootlets or a cabbage leaf that had been dropped on the ground last year. The hare's concern for his own life was inexhaustible, and his desire for food was constant. After eating whatever was there in the ground, the hare defecated a little and played with his tail. He then began to bat one of his paws with the other three; after that he played with the remains of some dead bark, with bits of his own droppings, and even with empty air, trying to catch it between his front paws. Finding a puddle, the hare had a good drink, looked all around with moist, conscious eyes, then lay down in a little pit to one side, curled up into the warmth of his own body, and dozed off. He had already tasted all the delights of life: he had eaten, drunk, breathed, inspected the locality, felt pleasure, played a bit, and fallen asleep. Sleep was good, too: animals nearly always have happy dreams. Fyodorov still remembered the surprise he had felt when, as a child, he had cautiously watched sleeping dogs, cats, and chickens. They had made chewing motions with their mouths and produced blissful sounds, sometimes half opening eyes blind with sleep and then closing them again, stirring a little, and moaning because of the sweetness of their own existence.

The hunter approached the little hare, picked him up, and tucked him against his chest. The hare let out a squeak but did not wake; he just curled up tighter and pressed himself against the man's body for warmth, even though he was hot and damp already.

On Lobskaya Hill, like a constellation of impoverished stars, stood a hamlet of four little huts. The huts were small, poor, and unpainted, but they were cozy to live in, and so they seemed adequate, even spacious. The hunter went into the poorest, humblest hut. Its wooden roof had rotted and was covered with ancient moss. The lowest logs were now buried in the earth, as if returning to their birthplace, and from these logs, from the very lowest part of the hut, were growing two new weak branches, which would one day turn into mighty oaks and eat with their roots the dust of this dwelling that had been exhausted by the wind, the rain, and the human race. The hut stood on its own patch of land, which was walled off by stakes, stones brought from the shore of Lake Onega and piled up haphazardly, and rusty sheets of roof iron, probably carried here from some distant town by a gale. But this wall no longer held; the stones were falling down and the stakes had keeled over. One might have thought that this was the home of a struggling widow with small children, but, no, not at all—a complete and healthy family lived here. Were they slovenly, then, or always quarrelling? Far from it: the oldest man in the house, Aleksey Kirillovich, Fyodorov's father, was making a career for himself at the sawmill and hoping to build a new home soon; then he would leave the hut to be consumed by the roots of the young



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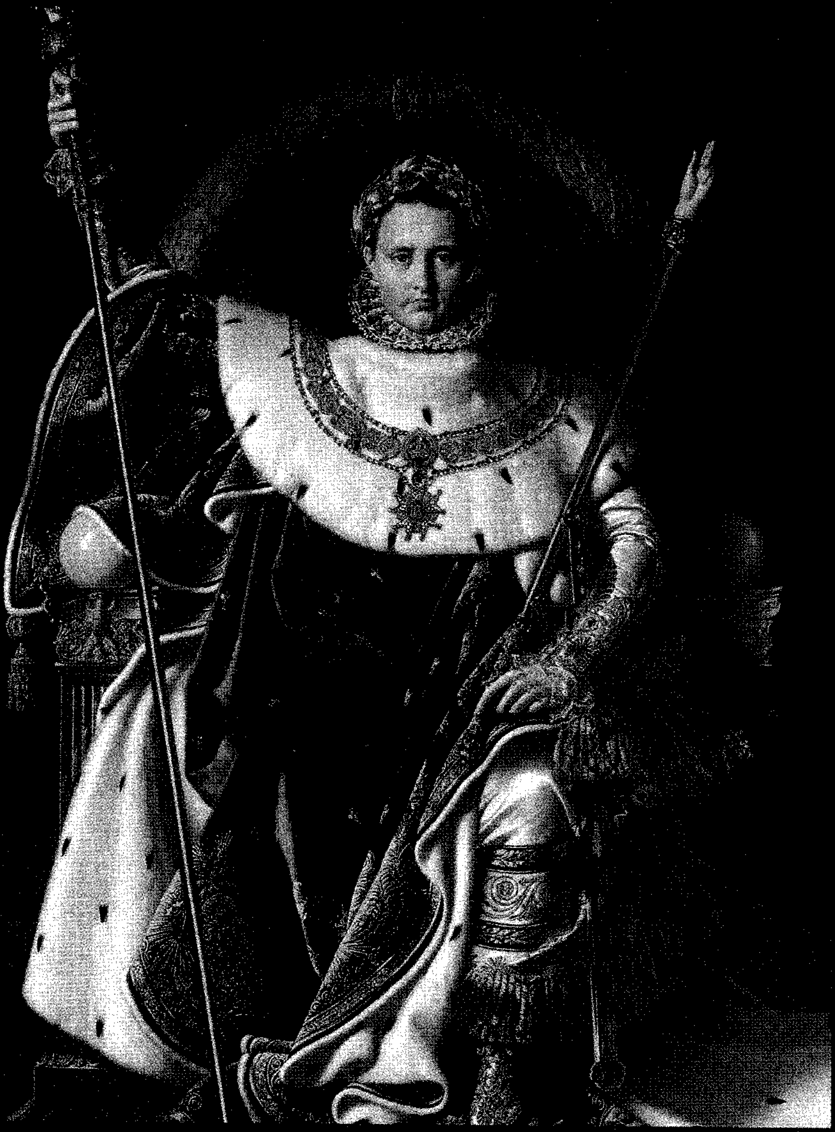

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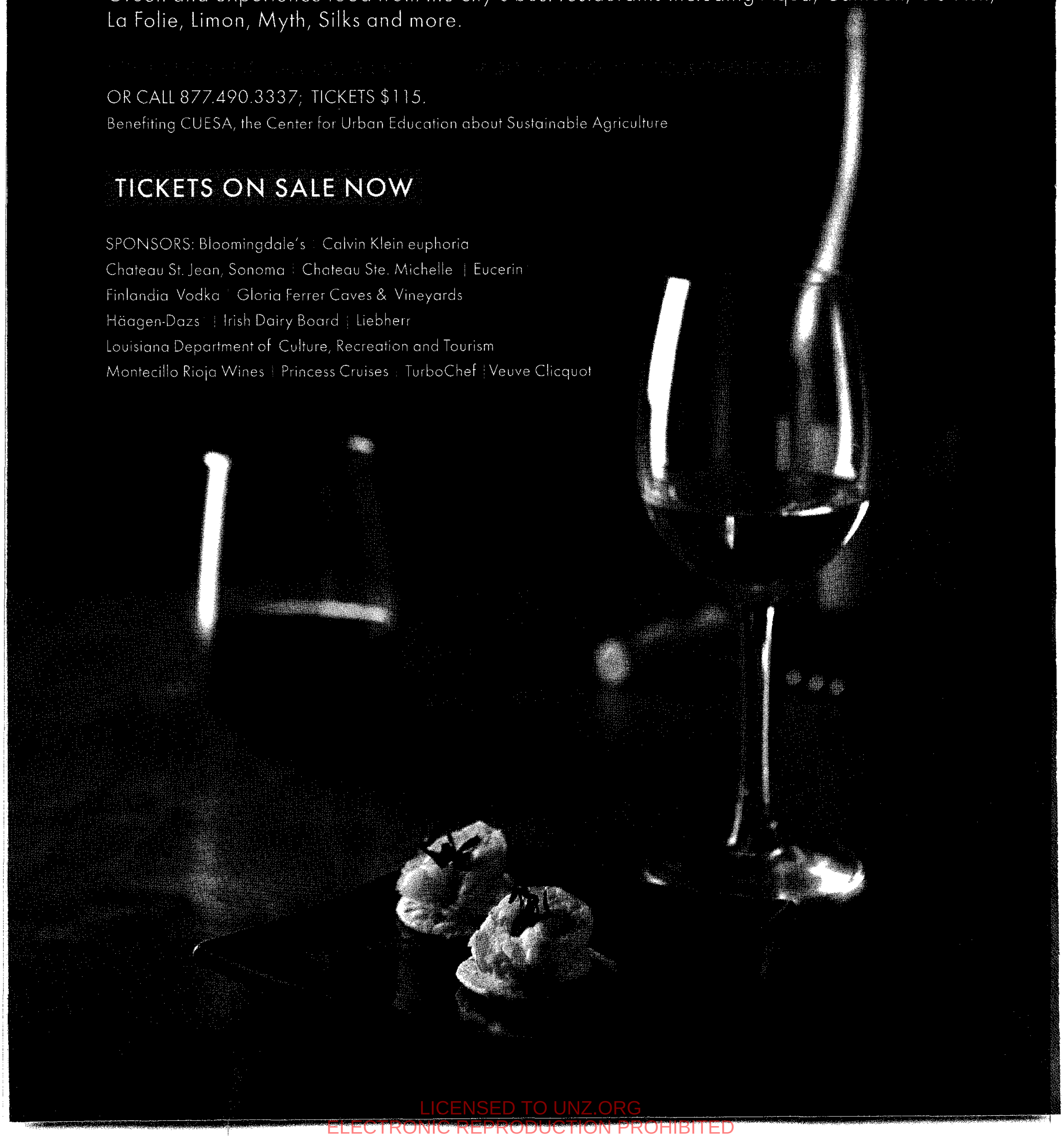

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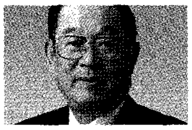

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oak. The old man was counting on life's taking a turn for the better; he had resolved to say a fond farewell to the past and forget it.

Inside, the whole family was sitting together. The old father was putting the radio into action—a single-valve wireless he had won about a month before. In actual fact, he was buying it from the trade-union committee, paying for it in installments, but at home, for the sake of his wife, he'd said that it had been given to him as a prize. The old man worked as a guard at the mill, yet even he wanted honor from his family and dreamed of becoming renowned throughout the nation. But his old woman soon discovered just how honorably her husband had been awarded his radio—how can you keep the truth from an experienced wife?

Fyodorov put the little hare down by the stove and took his ten-month-old daughter in his arms. She could already stand up and was learning to move around on her own feet: in fifteen years' time she would be ready to marry and would get down to having children herself—but for now let her just rest and grow in her parents' arms.

"One little hare—is that all you've brought?" Fyodorov's young wife asked. "You've got a family—you need to think a little when you're out and about. There are squirrels in the forest now, there's grouse, there's blackcock—and what do you bring back for us? A baby hare for us to play with! Pah! Wasting cartridges when you could be buying something we need!"

"Women have loved prosperity since time immemorial," Fyodorov's father observed. "They want everything, and lots of it—squirrels, grouse, and trunks full of cloth. Today they'd be called Socialists."

And he turned on the wireless straightaway, so as to hear that other world that lay beyond them, where universal history was happening and you could listen to the voices of the movers of fate.

First, an old man spoke, then a young man. Then a band played a mysterious song; a pipe from the steppe sang out; a bell was ringing. Next, a choir of young girls began a song about heroic Socialism, about happy people, about interesting life. The girls were singing far away, but the sense of the music remained clear: people should live in bliss, not in need and torment. Fyodorov caressed his little daughter, stroking her head, her chest, and her tummy, where one day her own children would be conceived and do their growing. They would be higher people, although he himself—their grandfather—was a nobody, just a switchman on a section of double track in a forest. The child was also listening to the music, but his wife, laboring at the stove, was drawing economic and cultural conclusions: "The life people live—you can hear it even from here! They buy new clothes, and they build houses, and they eat sweetly and well, and they go to theatres. They dance and sing and study science, and they swim in the Black Sea—while here we've got nothing but work and worry."

"All too true!" the old woman said. "Other men do a bit of this, a bit of that, and, before you know it, there's another kopek in the house. But you two don't know the meaning of work. You get back home and what do you do? You just sit about. Go and float logs! Ask in the barracks—there are new stoves to be made, tree stumps to be dug up, and they always need someone to skivvy in the kitchens. If you don't do something soon, it'll be the end of us!" By now, the old woman had hit her stride, her whole body shaking with rage in the middle of the hut. "But you two just sprawl about! Or you take your rifles and it's off into the forest! What for? What good does it do, wandering about under oak trees? Are there hens and piglets out there? Are the branches hung with cloth? Pah! And as for your tiny hares and baby grouse—if you brought them back by the cartload, well and good, but what's the use of just one or two? Not even a mouthful for an old woman like me! And don't you listen there to that trumpet of yours when I'm speaking—make it shut up!"

The old man turned off the wireless, and went on listening affectionately to his wife. He couldn't be bothered to argue with her; it was best to let her run out of steam on her own. Then she'd turn kinder again.

But the old woman went into action. She grabbed the hare baby, who was huddling against the oven fork beneath the stove, and began dragging him across the floor with her left hand as she beat him with her right, first on the behind

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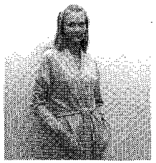

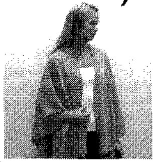

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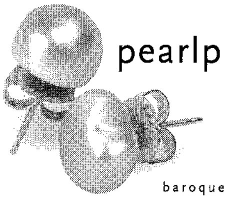

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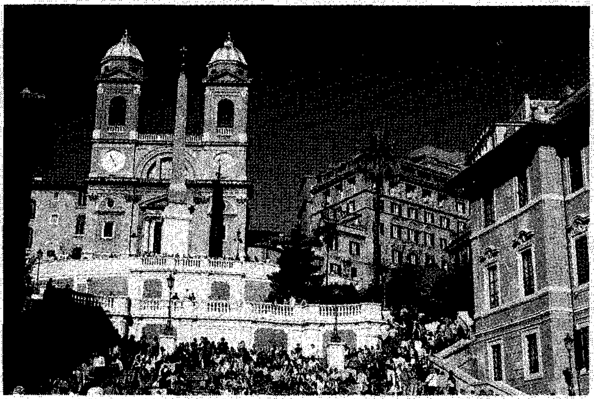

ITALY IN A POEM

> **"Rome is yet the capital of the world. It is a city of palaces and temples, more glorious than those which any other city contains, and of ruins more glorious than they."**
>
> —Percy Bysshe Shelley to Thomas Love Peacock, March 23, 1819.

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The year that Shelley spent in Italy, from the summer of 1819 through 1820, he produced renowned works, including "Ode to the West Wind," "The Mask of Anarchy," "To the Liberty and to Naples," and "The Witch of Atlas." Poetry lovers visiting Rome can see the Spanish Steps at the Keats-Shelley Memorial House, the building in which Keats died, in 1821.

Similarly, Elizabeth and Robert Browning spent their married life in Casa Guidi, in Florence, the setting for Elizabeth Browning's poem Casa Guidi Windows (Part II):

Alas, great nations have great shames, I say.
No pity, O world, no tender utterance
Of benediction, and prayers stretched this way
To poor Italia baffled by mischance?—
O gracious nations, give some ear to me!
You all go to your Fair, and I am one
Who at the roadside of humanity
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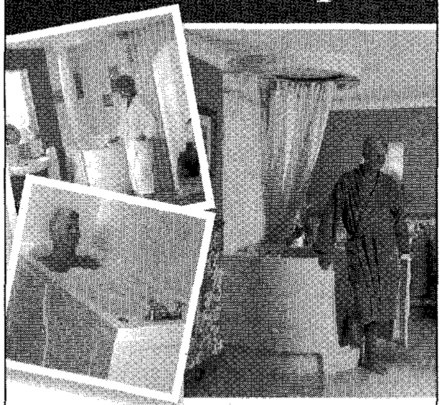

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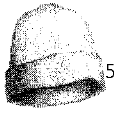

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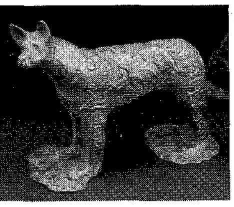

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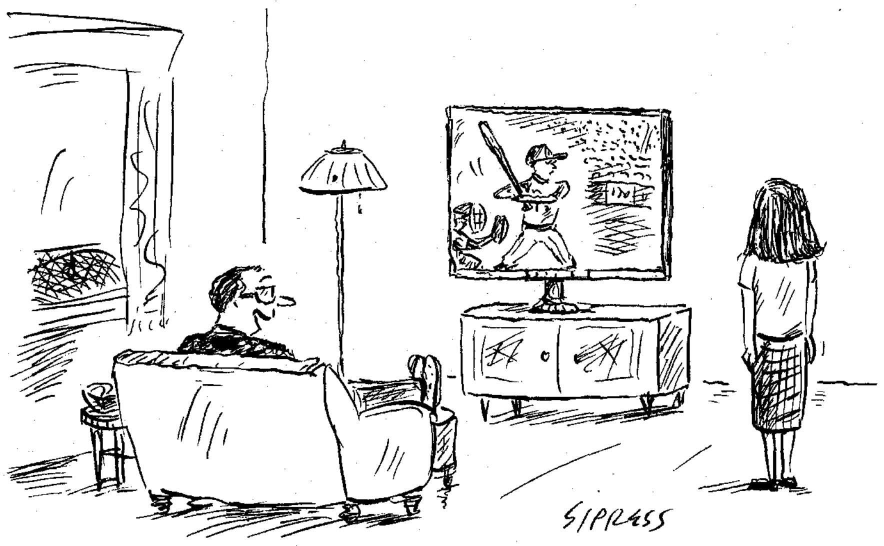


"To everything there is a post-season."

• •

and then on the ribs—it hurt more there, so venting her rage was all the sweeter. The hare trailed along the floor, suffering this calamity in silence, until the old woman came to the end of her dark strength. Then she picked the hare up and flung him outside—he was no use to them, and she did not want him soiling the hut. The hare hid in the grass, lamented a little in his own way, then tidied his fur, crept through a gap in the fence, and disappeared into the forest, putting aside his recent grief for the sake of future life.

Fyodorov's wife took the little girl from him—it was time to feed her. She was already dozing. She had watched the hare long enough.

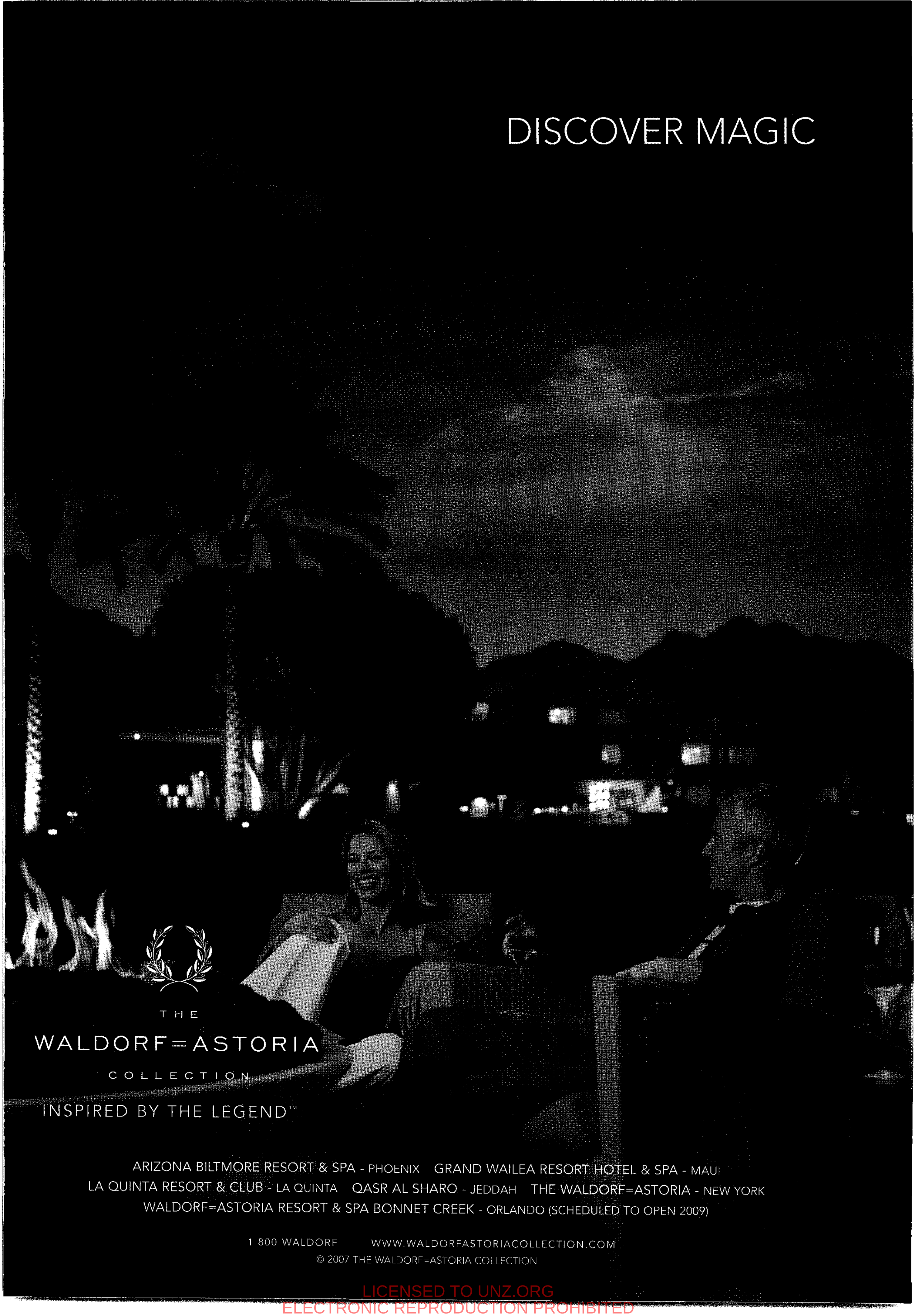
"Comrade Kaganovich is in charge of transport. Yes—Lazar Moiseevich," the old woman said. "I listen to the radio and I know everything. You know how people live these days? People everywhere are living with pleasure. But look at you—just look at the two of you!" she went on, turning toward her husband and son. "Sitting there with faces like plucked chickens!"

The old man and his son felt their faces, which were indeed a bit pockmarked. Not that this would cost them anything: they didn't lack people who loved them. Should Aleksey Kirillovich die, there would be at the very least two people weeping for him: his wife and his son. And that was enough.

"Turn on the wireless," the old woman ordered her husband. "I need to listen—otherwise I'll miss something and I'll carry on living in darkness, and all the benefit will go flying by."

The head of the family turned on his machine. First, the wireless came out with a moral admonition, then tender music began to play. The old woman put her right hand to her cheek and looked wistful; then she began to smile. She would have liked to be kind all the time, but that was not possible—everything would get eaten up, drunk, or worn out, the men would stop working, and the whole family would die of want. The hut and its land would be taken over by forest, and the hare would come out of the bushes and soil what had once been a dwelling of the human race.

It was night, and Ivan Alekseyevich Fyodorov was beginning his day's work. Section 10 was in the middle of nowhere, and there was little to be done in the way of loading or unloading. Fyodorov examined and cleaned his switches and inspected the crossovers with his lantern. He was always afraid for them—the locomotives gave them quite a pounding, and one day the metal might crack. If Fyodorov could have become an engineer, he would have invented some better kind of switch—a switch that a train would pass over smoothly. He knelt down and crawled from the switch rails to the frog of the crossover, sliding his hand along the running surface and the head of



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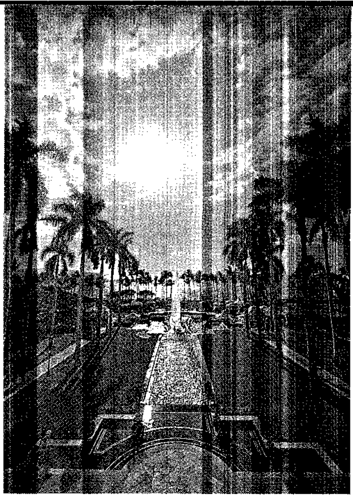

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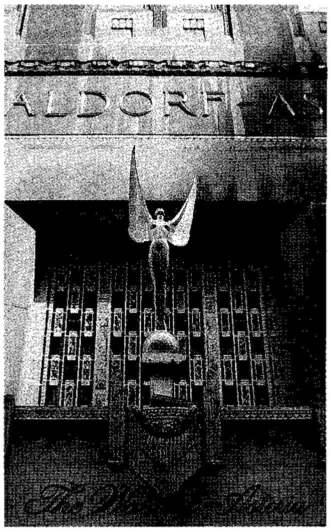

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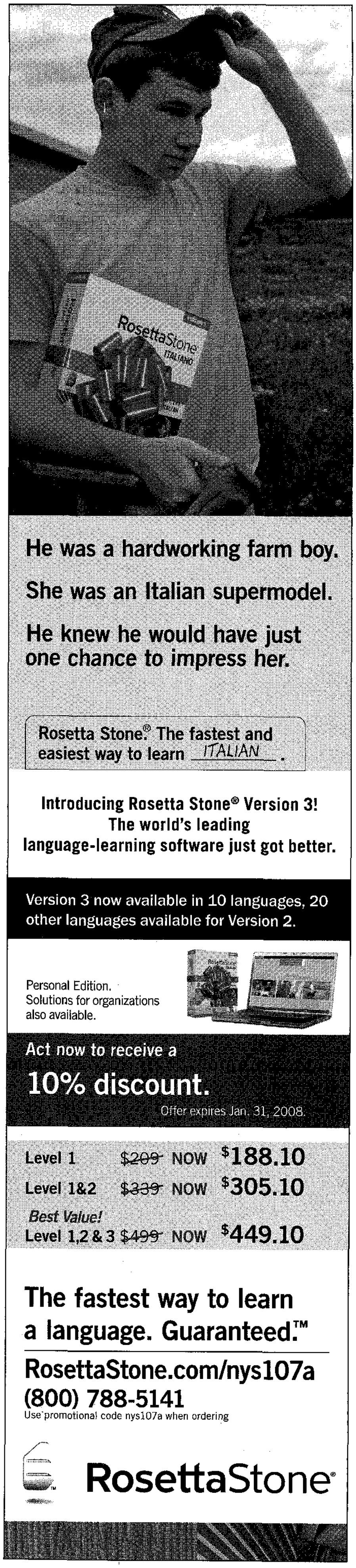
the rail and feeling for possible corrugations or dents, or burrs shaved off by the wheels of the locomotives. He could find no damage—one small indentation, but nothing dangerous.

Fyodorov cleaned off the old grease and applied generous quantities of new grease to all the areas of friction, the thicker the better. He had noticed that, when a heavy train passes over, a well-greased switch rail has some play, as if swimming in the grease. Let it play, then—play protects! If something isn't stressed, it won't be tormented and it won't break.

When he first began to work on the railway, Fyodorov had treated metal and machines as he treated animals and plants—with caution and foresight, trying not only to get to know them but also to outwit them. Then he had realized that such a relationship was insufficient. Being with metal and machines required a great deal more sensitivity than being with wild animals or with plants and trees. You can outwit something living and it will yield to you; you can wound it and, being alive, it will heal. But machines and rails don't yield to cunning—they can be won over only by pure goodness—and you can't afford to wound them, because they don't heal. A break is mortal. And so Fyodorov behaved sensitively and carefully at work; he even avoided slamming the door of his little cabin, closing it silently and delicately, so as not to disturb the iron hinges or loosen their screws.

The railwayman on duty phoned the cabin: Fyodorov was to check the switches and signal "Line clear" so that the express could pass. Fyodorov knew the time of the train, anyway. He was already looking into the forest, along the dark cut where the track lay. There was no moon, and the stars were high and faint, but the rails shone clear and far, as if they were gathering, out of the poverty of darkness, the light that had been scattered in the gloom. Fyodorov lay down with his ear to the rail and heard the metal's eternal song—its response to the flow of the air and to the noise of leaves and branches. The rails were singing in tune—the whole stretch was intact and healthy. But gradually this steady wavelike hum was joined by a vague extraneous mutter. Then this mutter grew more distinct and insistent; it was almost articulating words. This language was being sung by a young voice, and there were no false notes, no sounds of jangling irritation—proof that there were no cracks in the rails and that the metal had not been worn away at the joints. The switchman lifted his head from the rail, blew his nose, brushed the dirt off his clothes, and adopted a serious, dignified expression. Bound for Murmansk, an express was hurrying through from the south. The locomotive's calm light rose up from the horizon, chasing the darkness forward through the forest, lighting up deep-blue living trees, bushes, mysterious objects invisible during the day, and the figure of a switchman, watching over the track in darkness and solitude. Fyodorov played a long welcoming note on his horn to signal that the section was ready for the train to enter, and respectfully held his lantern out toward the engineer, his unknown friend, the only person who was aware of him at that moment, and who would be pleased that all was as it should be.

He's really tearing along, Fyodorov thought. I won't hear any music. He's four minutes late and he's going full steam ahead, the devil! If the Polar Arrow or some other fast train went by slowly, Fyodorov could sometimes make out the sound of the radio or a portable gramophone. For a few seconds, he'd listen intently to the melody, oblivious of all other noise. If there was no music playing, he was happy just to catch sight of some strange or handsome face looking out the window at the region's unfamiliar forests. It was all the same to the switchman whether the face belonged to a man, a woman, or a child; nor did it matter where the person was going—just as long as the face was interesting and incomprehensible. Occasionally, after a train had passed, Fyodorov would discover some object on the track and try at length to fathom its significance. Then he would try to imagine the person it had belonged to, and he would feel at peace only when he had formed in his imagination a clear picture of the unknown passenger who had hurtled by. Once, he'd found a lady's handkerchief; it had had a pleasant smell, and there was fresh blood in the middle of it. He'd touched the damp cloth with his tongue; the moisture was salty—probably tears. Then he'd had to rack his brain for



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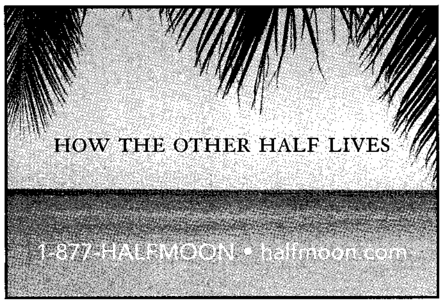

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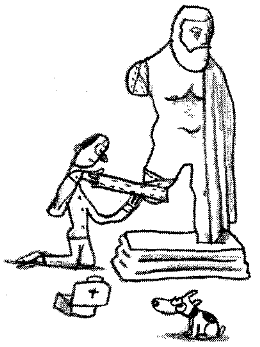
a long time in order to imagine fully for himself the mysterious, pretty woman who had dropped this handkerchief from the back of the coach, crying and yearning for the man she loved, coughing blood into the handkerchief because of the consumption that burned in her chest. Afterward, Fyodorov had dreamed of this woman. Her little daughter had bitten her tongue and made it bleed; the girl had started to cry and the mother had wiped away her tears and blotted up the blood with the handkerchief, looked out through the open window of the carriage, thrown the handkerchief outside, and smiled at the switchman. "Wind up your gramophone!" Fyodorov had called to the woman. "On the way back!" the passenger had answered. "All right," the switchman had agreed. "But make it nice and loud!"



Sucking up all the air behind it, the train gave the switch a merciless working over.

"Aha! Kaganovich really has given you a fright. Four minutes late out of the forest—and only three at the switch!" Fyodorov calculated. "Dramatic stuff!"

But there was no chance now of hearing music from the train or being able to make out a human being. Formerly, the water from the toilets had flowed out in a stream, but now it was thin vapor—the speed of the train tore it into prickly spray.

The thought of not hearing music made Fyodorov sad for the rest of the night. His section of track had no theatre and no library; there was only the track inspector's accordion, and the track inspector seldom visited this section and when he did he often forgot to bring his accordion, even though he had given a written promise to the local trade-union committee to take it with him wherever he went and to go to all the Red Corners and play the new repertoire, omitting the chaos that had been condemned in the Moscow newspapers. One summer, a member of the Writers Union had come and given a talk about the current state of creative dialogue among writers. Fyodorov had asked sixteen questions and had been given "The Travels of Marco Polo" as a present; the writer had then left. The book was extremely interesting; Fyodorov had at once begun reading, from page 26. At the start of a book, a writer is just thinking, and that makes it dull; the most interesting part is the middle, or the end, which was why Fyodorov preferred to choose pages at random—now page 50, now page 214. And although every book is interesting, reading this way makes it even better, and still more interesting, because you have to imagine for yourself everything you have skipped, and you have to compose anew passages that don't make sense or are badly written, just as if you, too, were an author, a member of the Soviet Union's Writers Union. Fyodorov had been so carried away by one book—"Lime," or was it "Stone"?—that he had read it from the end all the way to the beginning and had realized that it was a good book but that if you began at the beginning it would be false and ideologically suspect.

For three hours that night, there were no trains; somewhere there had been a delay or an accident. The switchman examined the switch again, checking that the express had done no damage, then went into his cabin, pulled the door to, and played a few notes on his signal horn. But this was unsatisfying. Fyodorov wanted to hear a melody in an orchestra and to watch a spectacle in a theatre, so as to have some understanding in his soul about the truth of life and to see the universal horizon.

In the morning, his wife, Katerina Vasilievna, came out to him. "Let me clean the switch for you!" she said. "Maybe someone will notice. Nowadays, these things do get noticed. You must try your hardest."

"There's no need," Fyodorov said. "The relief will be here soon. He doesn't need a soubrette!"

"What do you mean, soubrette?" his wife exclaimed furiously. "Who taught you that word? You didn't know it yesterday. Have you been seeing someone here during the night?"

Fyodorov felt a little frightened. "I read it a year ago in a book. There was this king's daughter—"

"I know, I know about you and your king's daughter. And who was it getting friendly with junior switchwoman Fedotova the other day—right here at the switch? Along comes lover boy, and he sits down on the counterweight and takes her in his arms!"

"It wasn't me!" Fyodorov said. "How could it have been? I was on duty."

"I know it wasn't you!" Fyodorov's wife informed him. "As if I'd let you carry on like that and cause a disruption to transport!"

Katerina Vasilievna took a broom and began to sweep the track around the switch. Then she cleaned every speck of dirt off the switch itself and wiped the crossover and the two blades. The switch looked spick-and-span now, like a pot or a pan belonging to a fastidious old woman.

"I'm going to make an application. I want to be transferred to Bear Hill," Fyodorov informed his wife. "There's a big station there. There's a theatre, a club, and a cinema. A man can develop himself there."

"That's all I need! You'll develop yourself there—and then what'll I do? Nowadays, there are fine clothes in the shops; the young girls look beautiful. You'll leave me—you'll leave me and the family here in Lobskaya Hill."

Fyodorov reached out to his wife and carefully stroked her gleaming, pretty hair, so that she wouldn't grieve in advance.

"Don't," she said, gently taking his hand away. "You might be seen by a supervisor on a flatcar. He'll say you're careless and negligent. There's nothing to stop you stroking my hair at home—but you never remember."

The switchman carried on trying to talk his wife round: "People have merry lives in Bear Hill. One can get oneself educated there, and it's easier to be noticed."

In her mind, his wife calculated all the mysteries, losses, and gains, trying to imagine how everything would turn out. "Could you become a renowned transport worker?" she asked.

"Yes," Fyodorov answered obediently.

"All right, then," she agreed. "Only I'm frightened you'll stop loving me. What will become of me and our little girl then? I'm getting on now—I'm twenty-four." She fingered a button on her husband's shirt.

In answer, Fyodorov touched his wife on the shoulder. "I won't stop loving you," he said. "I've got a small heart. It hasn't got room for anyone except you. And then you can start studying—you'll like it. You'll become a famous woman."

"But it's a long way to Bear Hill," his wife said. "You'll wear yourself out!"

"I'll manage," Fyodorov said.

His wife sat down on the rail and thought everything over once more.

"All right," she agreed. "Write an application. And get them to give you a raise. And don't go spilling ink on the paper again—if they think you're illiterate, they'll subtract your raise."

Fyodorov looked at his wife and wondered, Is she beautiful or not? Her hair's still black, she's young. She's not so bad.

The section director did not try too hard to hold Fyodorov back: Let the man go to a big station, let him develop himself. You can deny a man an extra ruble or one of life's comforts, but you can't deny him what he needs for his soul. You'll end up with nothing—no man and no worker.

The switchman began travelling to Bear Hill. He would be away from his family for two or three days at a time—he would stay on after his shift to watch a show, or he would go to the library and read books in the hall of culture, glancing admiringly now and then at the portraits of great writers and their various hangers-on. He would begin a book in the middle or at the end; he would read every other page or every third page, taking pleasure in the lofty thoughts of others and his own supplementary imagination. If his mind tired, he would go outside to air his head—but somewhere or other music would always be playing, either an accordion in a workers' hostel or a gramophone in the window of a room belonging to a prosperous office worker. And Fyodorov would stand there for a long time, or perhaps sit down on some nearby rock, and hear the music through to the end; he would feel happy and ready for heroic deeds. But sometimes the music or what he was reading would all of a sudden cease to act on him—or, worse, he would fall into despair or irritation, no longer able to see the bright horizon promised to him by music, by reading, by the art of imagination and the excitement of a sensitive heart. It was as if he had be-

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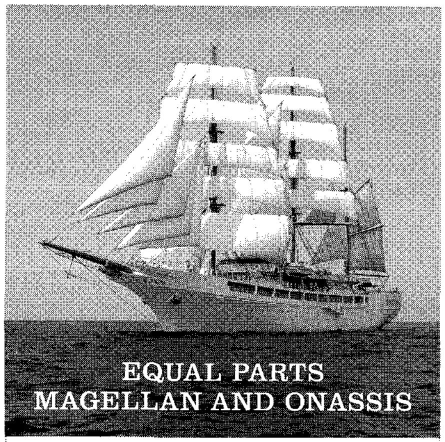

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come stupid and his soul had stopped caring about anything. Then, after reading a book on dialectical materialism, Fyodorov understood that a contradiction was at work inside him, and this was why he was sometimes gripped by a dark, alien sadness. But, insofar as that was the truth, how sad that there was no way out from the truth.

Eventually, having worked, read books, and listened to music to his heart's content, Fyodorov would go home to Lobskaya Hill, to the hut that was turning into the roots of an oak. Katerina Vasilievna would meet him, filled with anguish and zealous fury: it was clear that her husband loved another woman, a better woman, a beautiful stranger of a wicked woman. The switchman tried to explain to his wife that a wicked woman was still a woman—and therefore not so very different from a wife.

"All the same," his wife began, and Fyodorov was unable to guess just what was going to be the same as what. "Maybe there is pleasure in Bear Hill," she went on angrily, "but just look at the state of your switch! It's filthy. And when are you going to make your mark in the world? When's life going to get easier for us? I'd rather you'd stayed in Section 10 for the rest of your life—at least I could keep an eye on you here."

Aleksey Kirillovich, after listening to scenes like this between his son and his daughter-in-law, would usually suggest to his son that they go out hunting, to be with animals and plants. A child is always precious, even when he's no longer young. And sometimes women are a real burden on your soul—they make you want to give up. But who knows? Perhaps that's how things have to be: after all, women are the ones who give birth to people. They're in charge of humanity; they know best.

"You should find some disaster to prevent, Ivan Alekseyevich," the old man once said to his son. "Heroism's quite the thing these days."

"Blockhead!" the old woman said. "Do you want our boy to die?"

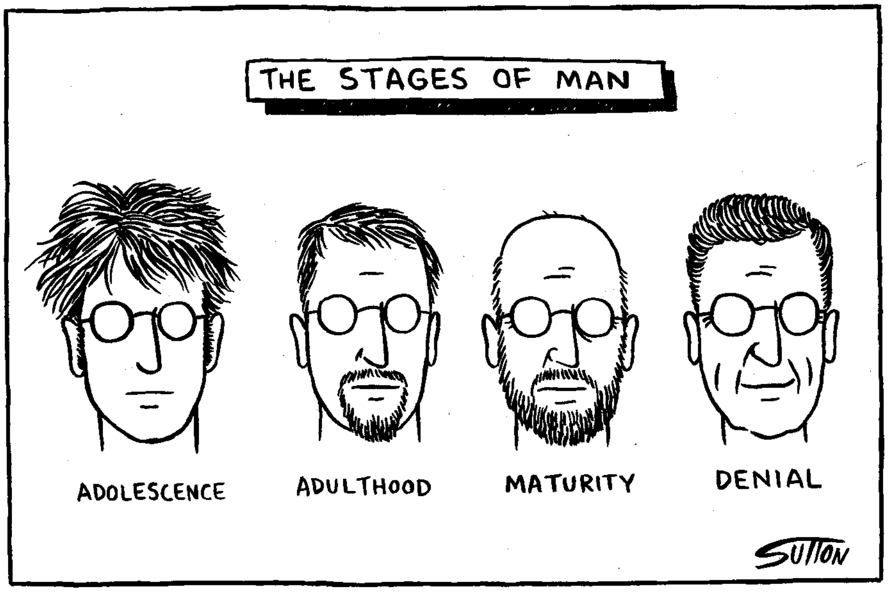
"It's not yet time for him to die," the old man said. "And it could be a small disaster, nothing too serious."

The old woman sighed and said, "When I look at you, old man, I wonder what on earth can have got into me when I was a girl and I chose you for my husband!"

"Find someone else, then!" the old man advised her.

"I may have to!" she agreed. "But first I need to plump up a bit. I had a fine figure once. I had curves. I was quite a woman. I only had to go out onto the street and stamp my foot and you men would all be filled with longing. I've wasted my life—I wish I could have it over again. Then you'd see me living it up! Still, why sit and moan? It's not too late—I can have the life of a young woman now! Isn't that what Soviet power's all about?"

At Bear Hill, Fyodorov worked even more conscientiously and thoughtfully than he had done on Section 10. Here life had more culture and there was more supervising authority, so Fyodorov's



sense of himself was modest and shy—and this shyness increased his diligence. Constantly seeing powerful locomotives and precise signalling mechanisms, listening to the roar from the engines of heavy freight trains, the switchman felt that his reason had triumphed, as if he, too, were to blame for all this universal technological power and its charm. Secretly and hazily, he perceived the correspondence or kinship between music, books, and locomotives; machines and music seemed to him to have been invented by one and the same heart, a heart like his own.

The stationmaster had known his new switchman for a long time, ever since Fyodorov was a boy and used to go hunting with him. He kept him back awhile, then promoted him to senior switchman. Fyodorov was now in charge of a number of switches and the junior switchmen who operated them. Not knowing how to be in command of others, he began by doing all their work for them; he cleaned and greased the switches himself and went out to meet every train, even though the train was already being met by a junior switchman. The junior switchmen lived in bewilderment. "What is it, Ivan Alekseyevich? Aren't we working-class enough for you? Why are you greasing the switches yourself? We haven't been put here for nothing, you know."

"But can you do everything the way I do?" Fyodorov asked.

"The way you do?" one elderly junior switchman said. "Not likely. We'll do things better."

"That's as may be," Fyodorov said gloomily. "You do a job. I work by feeling."

Fyodorov spent some time checking the work of his juniors and realized that they did things well, but not better than he did. They had no idea that machines and mechanisms are orphans and that you need to keep them constantly close to your heart. Otherwise, you won't notice when they're ill and shivering—and then before you can do anything you'll hear the sound of a crack in the switch and death.

After long hours of listening to the single-valve radio, Fyodorov's mother ceased to hope for anything from her husband or her son. She had been feeling envious for a long time of the higher life of the state, where there was now heroism, renown, and vigor, and where the youth and strength of an old woman, vainly expended in deprivation and horror in the old days, were in demand again. With the diligence and reason she'd acquired through the hard task of managing a poor-peasant homestead, the switchman's mother began work of state importance at the small tarworks five kilometres away. She sensed at once that it was not so very difficult to make tar, and her careful labor really did help the tarworks. It began to overfulfill its plan a little, and that autumn Fyodorov's mother received a prize: a gramophone, along with twenty records, and a jacket. (The management promised to give her a skirt later, when their quota of woollen cloth was delivered.)

Aleksey Kirillovich fell into melancholy when his old woman was given a gramophone and a jacket. He tested his muscles, stroked his head thoughtfully, and felt the rest of his body: did he still have the strength for some powerful fame- and prize-winning action? Not that his old woman had been bragging, but he could hear her unspoken reproach: "Yes, there are important things going on in the world today. And you never take anything seriously!"

The old man sighed, picked up his rifle, and went off to the forest to shoot something.

"Where are you going?" his wife called out. "Off through the bushes again, getting your clothes torn? You'd do better to join a club and learn something or other. I suppose you'll be back with a squirrel or a baby hare. A fine feast that'll be!"

"Let me at least have a breath of oxygen!" the old man replied. "I want to supplement my strength so there'll be more work capacity."

"What do you mean, oxygen?" the old woman exclaimed in surprise. "I've never breathed oxygen in all my life—and look at me now! You can't keep up with me."

"I'm a backward old man," Aleksey Kirillovich said.

"Backward? Come home empty-handed and I'll really make you backward! Out there in the forest you've got to keep one step ahead—or you'll get yourself eaten!"

Just then the son, who had come home from Bear Hill, asked his mother to wind up the gramophone.

"The old ones do the work, the young ones give the orders!" the mother said. She

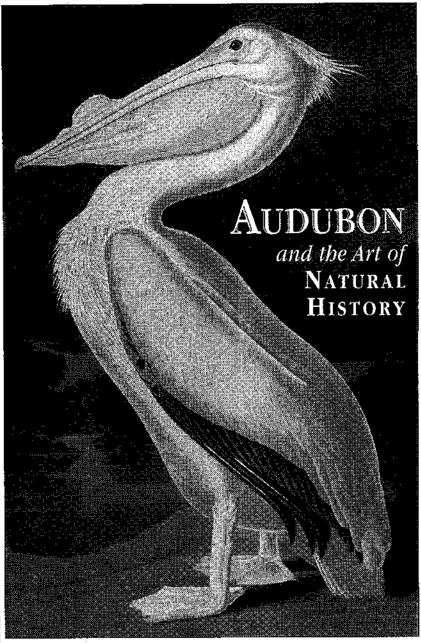


Plate 311, *American White Pelican*
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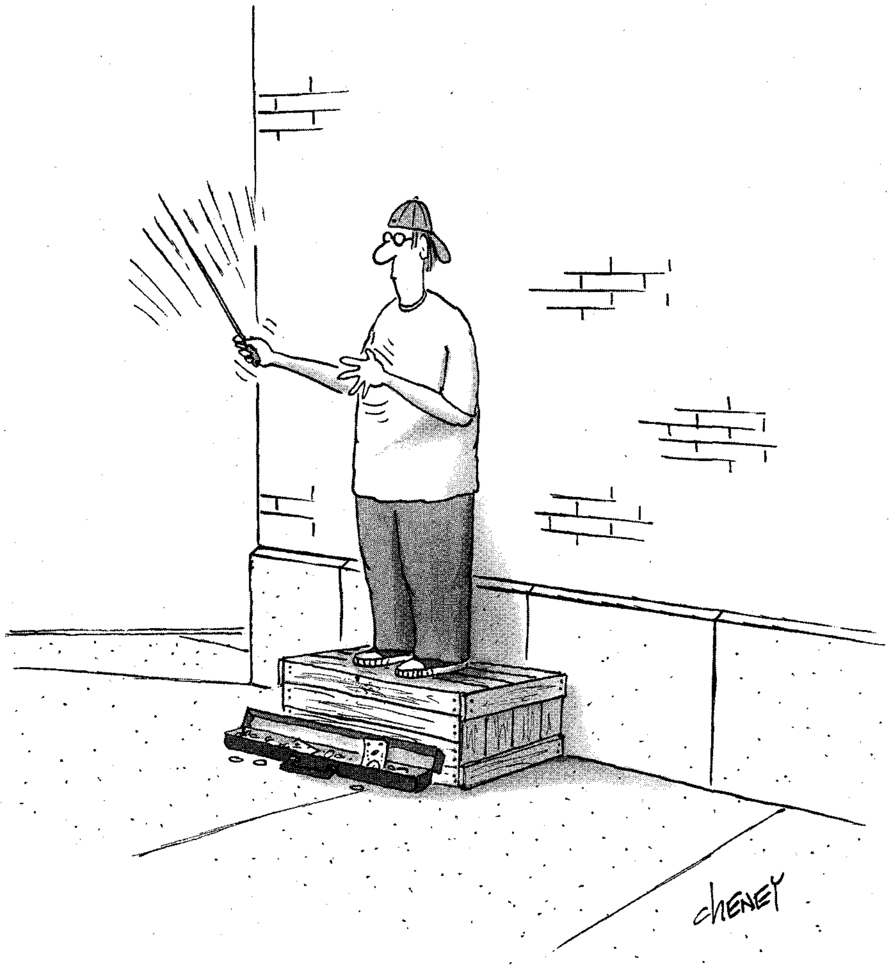


wound up the gramophone and put on a record of some merry music. She already understood all about the workings of the mechanism.

Katerina Vasilievna gazed wistfully at her husband.

"What's the matter with you?" Fyodorov asked.

"Nothing. Only that I've got a man who's good for nothing." His wife turned away and began to cry. Other people had gramophones and jackets and husbands who were supervisors, but what did she have? Just a hut—and shared with her mother-in-law at that.

She bent down over her baby daughter's cradle and fell silent in the sorrow of her fate.

Fyodorov looked out the window, into the forest: maybe he should run away. He was certainly never going to become any kind of supervisor himself—to be a supervisor you have to think special thoughts. But then one day the forest would be cut down. And it was getting better and better, more and more enigmatic, to be a part of humanity. Great machines and prefabricated palaces for the people were being transported along the railway on flatcars; thick books lay on the shelves of the library; splendid people were travelling in trains.

During his next shift, Fyodorov read an order from the stationmaster: from now on, senior switchman comrade Fyodorov was to receive an additional fifty rubles a month, and he was temporarily being appointed a coupler—a responsible position that many aspired to.

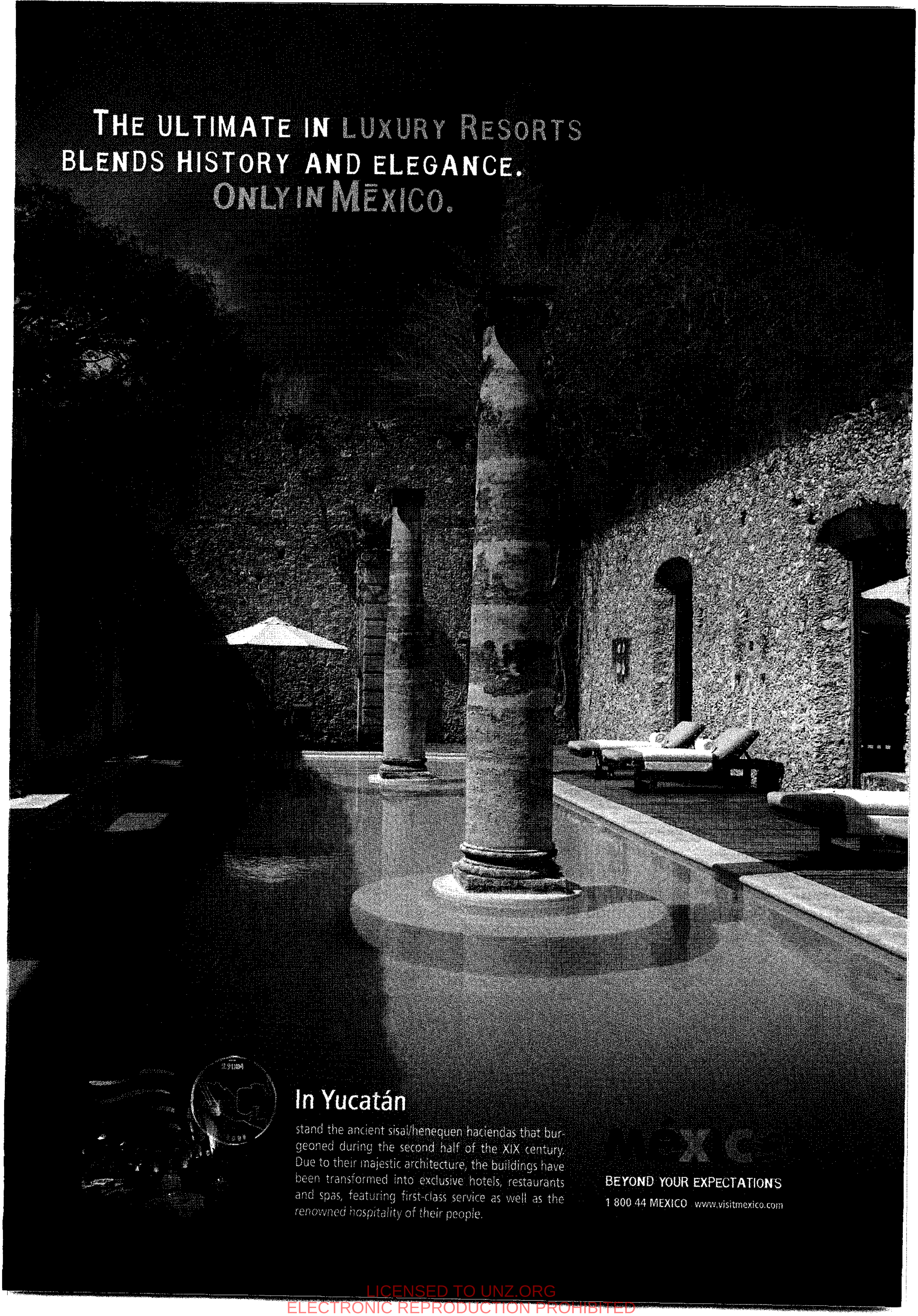
On a quiet, brief day well into autumn, crossties were being loaded onto flatcars at a dead-end siding. A dozen men and women were carrying crossties up little plank ramps, stacking them on cars, then going back down to lift another load onto their shoulders. Thus continued the circulation of labor.

The line out from the dead-end siding climbed straight up a hill, at a steep gradient; to pull fully loaded cars out of the siding, an engineer needed to have the regulator wide open and to use the sandbox, so that the driving wheels wouldn't slip. At the siding itself, a whole team—six men and women—were lying beneath some closed cars and dozing; this team had not yet been given any cars. They had nothing to do and did not want to fritter away their strength with empty living.

Fyodorov was doing what he could for them at the station. He got an engine to bring an empty flatcar to the top of the slope that ran down to the siding, and he ordered the driver to stop; from there the car would freewheel down, and at the bottom he would stop it by placing a wedge between the rails. To keep the car from running away, Fyodorov stuck an old abandoned crosstie, which happened to be lying beside the track, beneath one pair of wheels and started to unhook the coupling and free the locomotive. But the car had rolled away from the locomotive, and the coupling was taut. Fyodorov called out to the driver, "Move up a bit!" The locomotive moved up, the coupling slackened, and Fyodorov easily slipped it off the hook.

The car began to pull Fyodorov away from the engine and down the slope. He grabbed the coupling with both hands to stop the car, but the moving wheels had cracked the crosstie he had put beneath them and the iron of the coupling was starting to burn his hands; the car was now poised at the top of the slope—and at the bottom of the slope people were working. Fyodorov dug in his heels, bracing his feet against one of the working crossties. His hands didn't matter: the skin would burn, but it would heal again afterward. His legs began to ache from the effort. He was being dragged after the car. He understood that it was no good and let go of the coupling.

Down below him, people were working—and the population of the country was small enough as it was. Who would be left to live, who would remain for him to be friends with, who would play music if the runaway car were to crush these people to death? Fyodorov knew that there were women down there, too, and that they might give birth to people who would know how to write books, or to people with good characters and fine hearts, who one day would sing an unknown song or imagine in their souls a pockmarked switchman from Bear Hill and say, "Long ago there lived in the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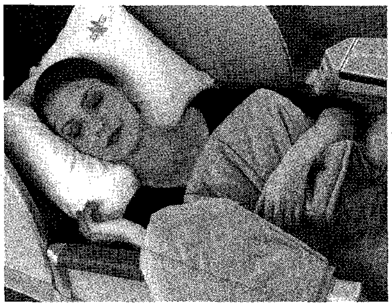
WELCOME TO THE NEXT GENERATION BUSINESS CLASS

A new generation of business travelers has joined the legions of road warriors who regularly cross continents and countries. To serve their needs, American Airlines has introduced a fleet-wide business-class upgrade in its 767-300 aircraft that provides enhanced comfort and convenience along with a fresh, new look to the cabin. Business fliers who've experienced the difference already have high praise for these changes.

TAKING A SEAT

Perhaps the greatest advantage of securing a business-class seat is the extra space it provides to work, to relax, to sleep. Fully adjustable, American Airlines' new next generation Business Class seats incorporate five motors that enable passengers to sit up, recline, or lie flat in a wide variety of positions that can be set with a memory button.

Space remains the final frontier, and cushion width starts at twenty inches. Raising the privacy divider and dropping down the outer armrest adds an additional three inches for hip room, making the twenty-three-inch space the widest in business class. In the flat position, the bed measures a generous seventy-seven inches; a quilted coverlet and Bose noise-canceling headphones virtually induce sleep on long flights.



STOWING LUGGAGE

Since many business travelers have perfected the art of compressing all their clothing and toiletry needs into one bag, the ergonomically designed overhead bins on the 767-300, which swing down and out provide even greater ease in loading carry-ons.

POWERING UP

Nearly all business-class passengers tote a laptop, and accessible power enables them to work longer. The next generation Business Class features power ports in the seat-back shell in front of each passenger, an improvement over floor or under-seat power ports provided by other carriers.

WORKING EFFICIENTLY

For those who like to spread out, the seat has two separate tray tables that can be interlocked to form a substantial seventeen-by-seventeen-inch space. A light mounted in the seat back illuminates the task area, while overhead light provides broader illumination.

ENJOYING ONBOARD ENTERTAINMENT

All work and no play produces unnecessary stress. Solution: the next generation Inflight Theater is a portable, personal entertainment device that passengers can use to cocoon themselves with the news, movies, music, games, and TV shows of their choice.

DINING ON YOUR SCHEDULE

New menus and fine wines appeal to business travelers' sophisticated palates. Dine Upon Request service makes meals available when you want them, and Express Breakfast allows you to sleep as long as possible.

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night night. lights out. hey this thing goes all the way flat. now i can sleep on my side. on my other side. on my - what's this? a duvet? what's a duvet? i don't know but man it's soft. and this pillow is plush. did i just say 'plush'? wow, i'm liking this new international business class on American.

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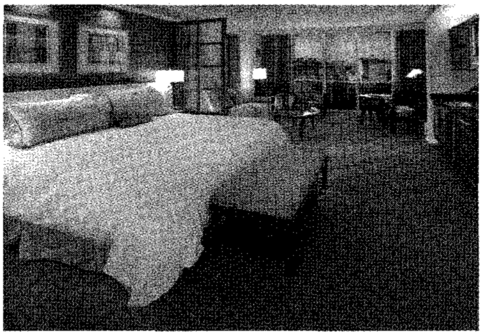

THE SIGNATURE AT MGM GRAND
TOWERING STANDARDS

The three golden towers of The Signature at MGM Grand offer much more than a distinctive change to the Las Vegas skyline. With this sanctuary-like addition to MGM Grand's portfolio, luxury comes with a spectacular view and the best of everything under one roof—from A-list entertainment and high-energy nightlife to award-winning restaurants and relaxing rejuvenation.

If you've stayed in Las Vegas in the past, you're familiar with the crowds at most hotels during check-in. Here, however, guests are given their key cards in a serene lobby off the private gated entrance.

The three adjacent towers of the Signature at MGM Grand offer 576 suites. Junior, one- and two-bedroom suites—only sixteen per floor—are designed to pamper guests with the highest caliber of amenities and comfort, including high-speed Internet access. Oversized marble-and-granite bathrooms feature a whirlpool tub, flat-screen TV, and the June Jacobs spa line of personal care products. In the bedrooms, a king-sized, pillow-top bed is swathed in Anichini linens. Each suite has either a kitchen or kitchenette, and most have a balcony, which is unusual for Las Vegas accommodations.

Services are intended to anticipate guests' every need. A concierge, bell staff, and a valet are all on twenty-four-hour call, and in-suite massages and same-day laundry and dry cleaning are available. The Signature also features a private lounge, a heated pool and cabanas, state-of-the-art fitness centers, a deli, and a Starbucks coffee shop.

The tranquil environment of The Signature juxtaposes the dynamic energy of nearby MGM Grand. Cirque du Soleil's KÀ combines heart-pounding acrobatic performances and martial arts in an astounding show, and there are a number of nightclubs and lounges where guests can toast the night away. Of note are Tabú Ultra Lounge, which has a chic, sophisticated feel, and Studio 54, which is a modern interpretation of the legendary club known for its lively atmosphere and edgy music.

Eighteen fine and casual dining options will please even the most discriminating palates. Recent additions include two restaurants by Joël Robuchon—the famed French chef who has been called "Chef of the Century." L'Atelier de Joël Robuchon presents the celebrated cuisine of the master chef in an accessible, informal style, while the eponymous Joël Robuchon provides an exclusive opportunity to experience the fullest expression of his cooking talents.

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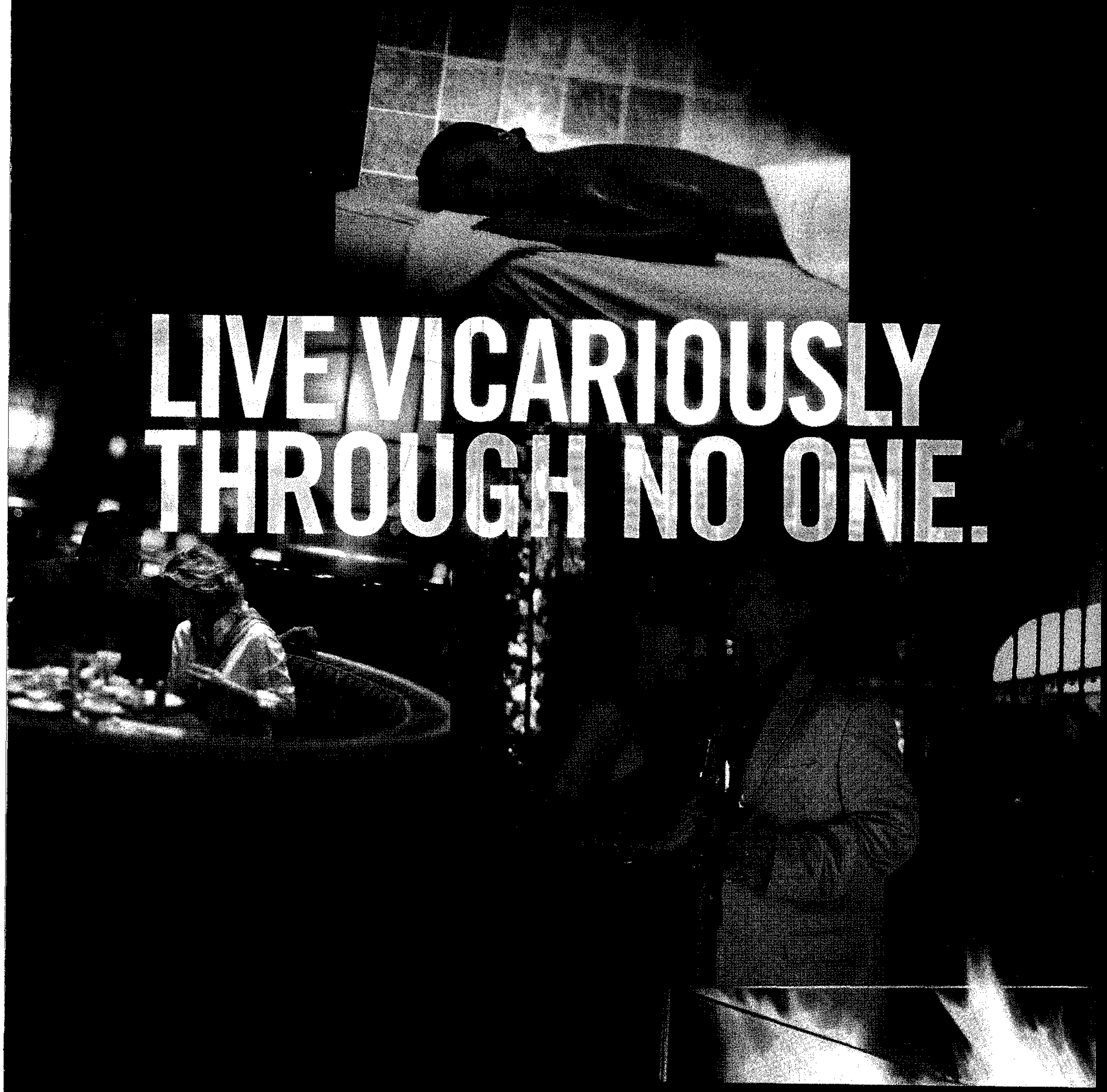
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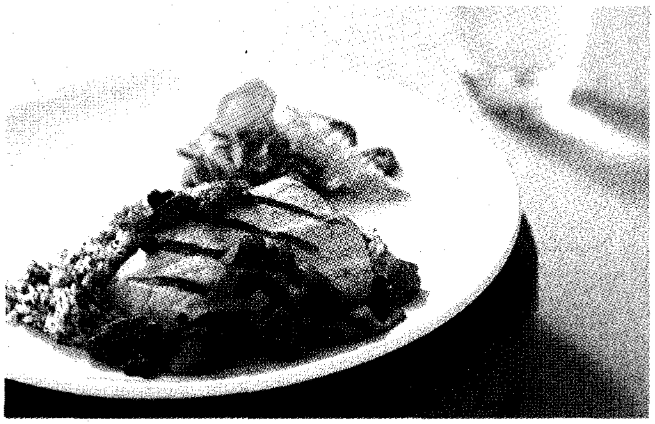
CULINARY PARADISE

Puerto Vallarta's beauty is legendary, but few travelers know that the resort's dining scene is one of the best in Mexico, considered second only to that of Mexico City. Six of the town's restaurants have received the Five Star Diamond Award, among them **Azul 96**, **Café des Artistes**, and **La Palapa**. Puerto Vallarta chefs are also raising their profile—Luis Fitch from **Los Xitomates** was awarded the Star Diamond Award, and is now considered one of the best chefs in Mexico.

The annual **Festival Gourmet International**, which is held this year from November 8th through 18th, spotlights the region's culinary offerings with mouthwatering delicacies, cooking classes, and wine tastings. Culinary professionals from around the world are invited to join forces with top chefs from local restaurants to create specialty menus and unique dishes for the occasion.

Travelers can extend their cultural exploration beyond the table by taking a walking tour of local galleries; exploring **San Sebastian**, a former colonial silver mining town; or visiting **San Andrés Cohamiata**, home to the native Huichol Indians.



JAMES CHUI/COURTESY OF PUERTO VALLARTA TOURISM BOARD

Relaxation is just as integral to a trip here as cultural exploration. Sybarites will be in good hands at one of the coastal town's world-class spas, including the new oceanfront **Ohtli**, the most spacious complete-service resort spa in the area. This grand retreat offers a full menu of pampering treatments that fuse modern innovation with Huichol tribal tradition and legend.

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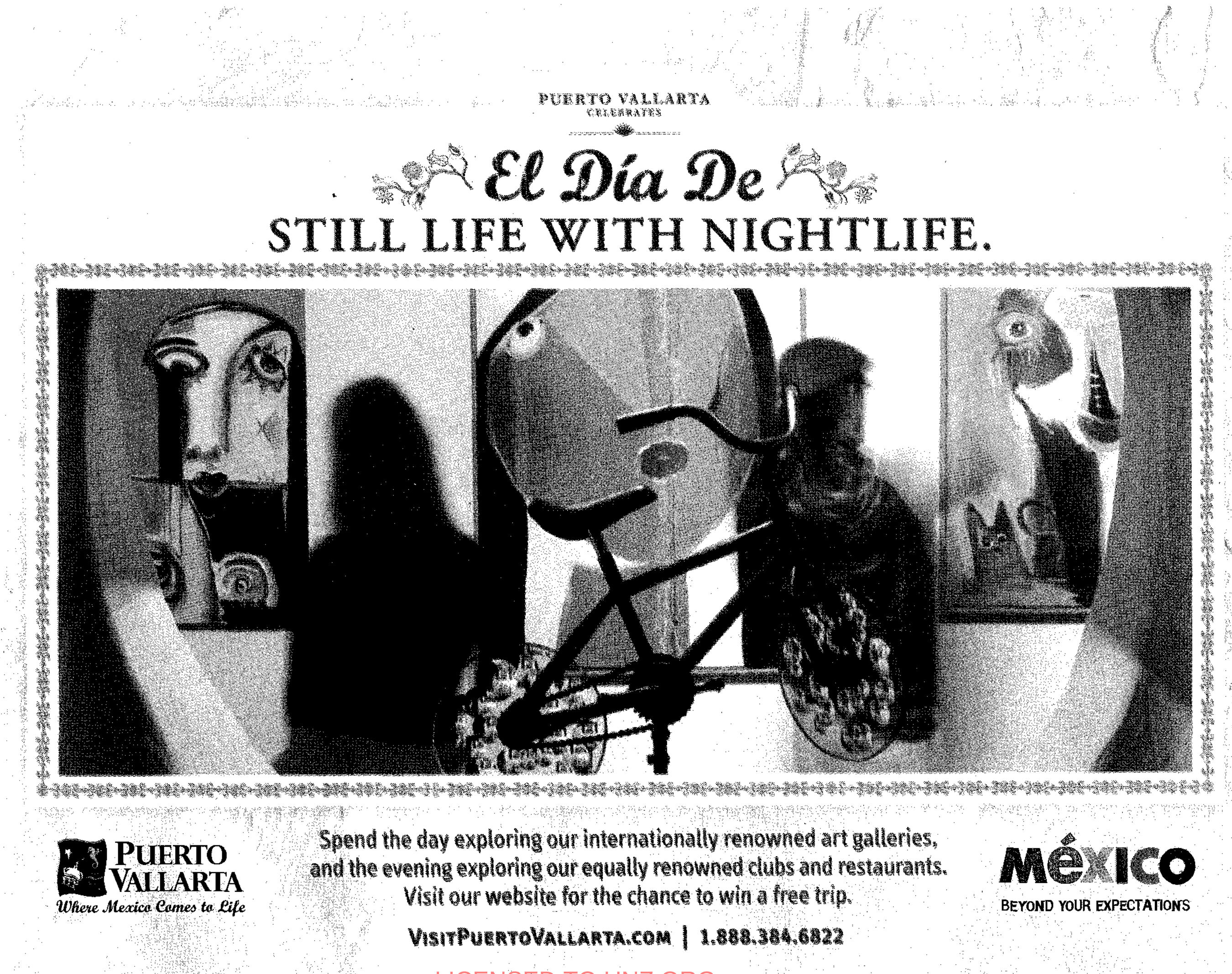
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world a poor man." He had to stop the car or else there would be fewer people, less humanity. There were animals and plants aplenty, but animals and plants were boring.

The car was gathering speed, and Fyodorov was running along beside it. He picked up planks and stakes from beside the track and flung them under the front wheels, but the car was going so fast that it crushed the wood to nothing and sped up even more. The world will be awful without them, Fyodorov thought, as he imagined the fate of the workers below him. They'll be buried in coffins with flowers. There'll be music, terrible music! He grabbed an iron crowbar that was lying on the ballast and, with precise aim, thrust it between the spokes of one of the rapidly revolving front wheels. The crowbar swung up into the air and the free end knocked Fyodorov off his feet and out of his senses, then threw him into the second wheel and smashed his head against the axle box. During the second or third revolution of the wheel, the crowbar began to twist and bend; the free end had caught against the ballast and the crossties. After digging into the sand between the crossties, it jammed between two of the spokes, went blue from the heat and tension at the point of flexion, and brought the car to a stop.

Fyodorov was lying in the sand. He could hear the engineer saying, "Fyodorov's had it."

No, Fyodorov thought. That's not true.

And he stood up to see what had happened.

"Are you alive—or what?" the engineer asked.

"What about you?" Fyodorov asked, and felt that his right arm was all cold, as if ice had been tied to it and, instead of melting, was sucking the warmth out of his body, reaching with its cold to the very center of his heart.

"Let's get on the engine and go back!" the engineer said.

But Fyodorov wanted something to drink. He turned on the tap in the tender and water began to pour into his mouth, while the blood from his right arm poured into his mitten and down the inside of his jacket; it was even making its way down his leg, inside his trousers and down to his foot. He realized that he was bleeding horribly—soon he might be completely empty—and he told the fireman to lift his right arm up into the air, so that it would not all flow out onto the earth.

They brought a stretcher and Fyodorov was laid down on it. He realized that they were having trouble getting his boots off; the right boot was full of blood, and his foot cloths had swollen up. "It'll go dry and stiff in the coffin and then it will squeeze my foot," Fyodorov said to himself. And he fell asleep in order not to know his death.

His father, his mother, and his wife all went to the hospital and stood by Fyodorov, but he did not notice them gathered around him.

"Ivanushka, what have you gone and done to yourself?" his mother kept saying. "We could have carried on as we were. We're all right—we don't need anything."

It was some time before Fyodorov woke up. It was quiet, he was in a big bed, and everything around him felt cultured and scientific. He did not know whether he had a right arm or not. He could see it lying beside him, but he didn't know if it was part of him or if it was lying there separately. He decided to experiment with it, and he made a small movement with his fingers. The fingers were alive: that meant that he would keep his hand and arm, and that death had been and gone long ago.

Soon afterward, all kinds of people came to visit him—the stationmaster, the Party organizer, Katerina Vasilievna, a photographer, the engineer, and two of the women who had been loading crossties at the siding. One of them brought Fyodorov a bouquet of flowers and two little cakes.

"He gets more than enough to eat here!" Katerina Vasilievna said to the women. "Why waste your money and disturb a sick man?"

The women went off in embarrassment.

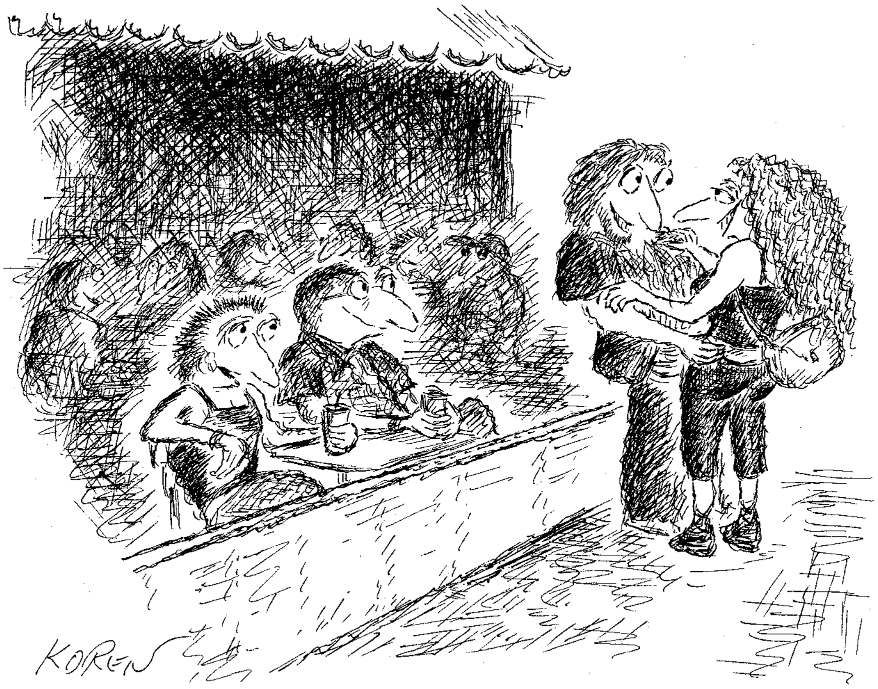
When Fyodorov left the hospital, his right hand and arm functioned only feebly and partially.

"You've crippled yourself!" his family said. "How will you work now?"

"I'll learn with my head!" Fyodorov said.

But most of the time his wife and his mother treated him kindly. The village soviet and the railway authorities gave him a thousand rubles and granted him a pension for life.

The stationmaster came to Lobskaya Hill every three or four days to visit Fyodorov and help him to study for a new job as a station duty officer. One day, a car climbed up to Lobskaya Hill and six people all arrived together, bringing



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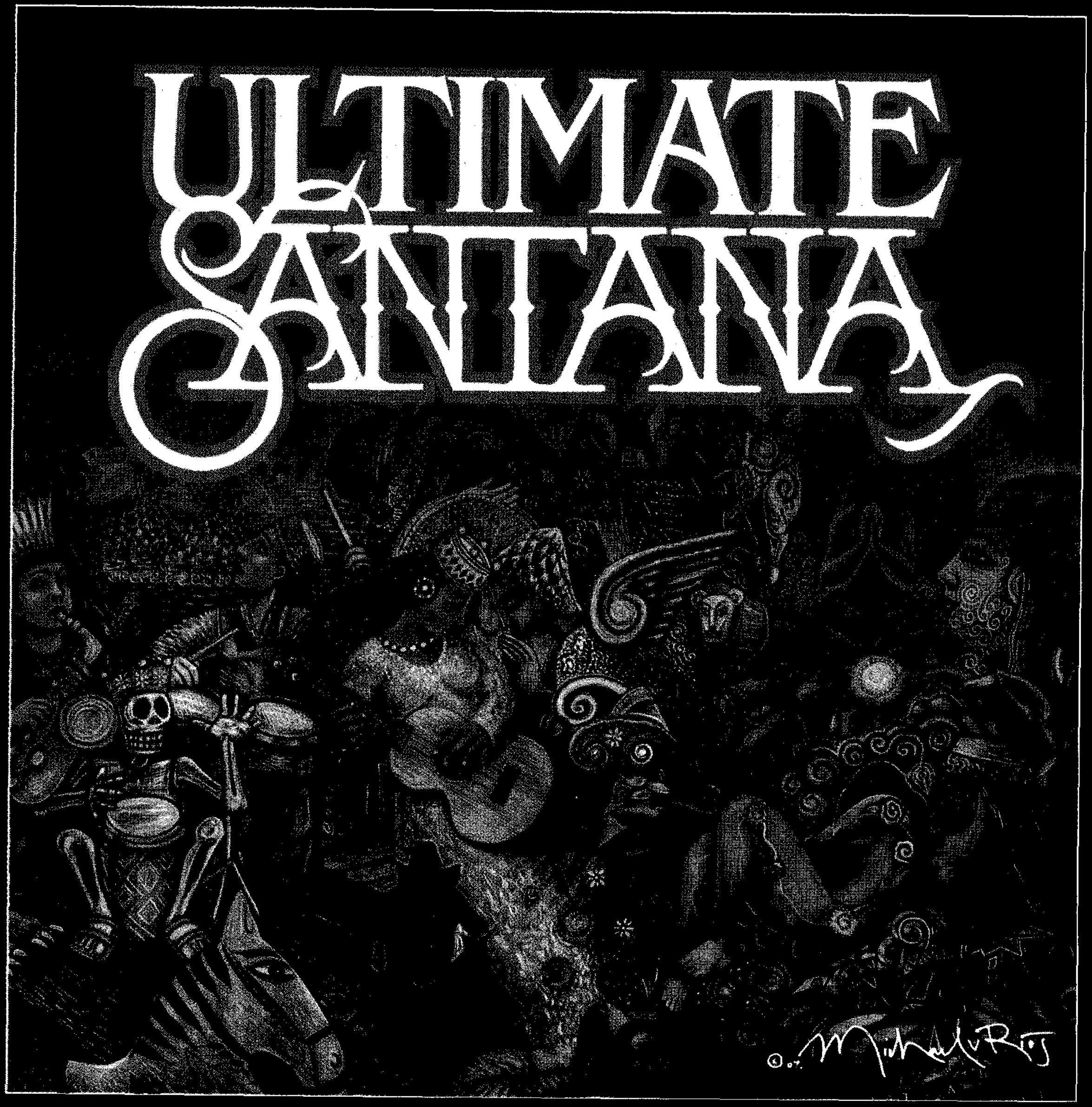

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him a telegram from Moscow and congratulating him on the medal he was to be awarded.

Fyodorov was unable to sleep the next two nights because of a strong flow of thought. On the third day, the stationmaster once again made the sixteen-kilometre journey to him. But, instead of getting down to the science of efficient utilization of the railway network, he said, "Pack your things—we're off to Moscow." Fyodorov did not even have anything to eat; he just drank a glass of milk, kissed his wife and daughter outside the hut, and set off.

During the days that followed, Katerina Vasilievna felt very unhappy in Lobskaya Hill; she missed her husband terribly and often wept, hiding her grief from her parents-in-law. He'll fall in love with a young parachutist! she thought. After all, they fly through the air, and I've heard they have such sweet little faces. Or maybe Comrade Kaganovich won't want to let him go—and then what will become of me? Then she remembered that her husband's right arm barely functioned and began to feel consoled: nobody would fall in love with a cripple; today's young ladies weren't stupid. But what about the medal? A medal was more important than an arm, and, anyway, her husband's hand and arm were still whole! And Katerina Vasilievna once again forfeited her hope.

Fyodorov came back a month later. He was wearing a black flannel suit; he was all serene, like a stranger, and he was driven into the village in a car. His wife sat down in front of him and put her hands out to touch her husband and the cloth he was wearing.

"Was it good there?" she asked.

"Yes!" Fyodorov said. "I saw an American woman in the metro. She was brown."

"Was she beautiful?" his wife asked.

"Nothing special," the husband answered.

"So what are you now?" Katerina Vasilievna went on questioning. "A supervisor?"

"A senior switchman. Supervisors are learned people, and I'm not."

He took out a medal in a box and showed it to his wife. Katerina Vasilievna took the medal and hid it in her trunk.

"I'm supposed to wear it. Why are you hiding it?" Fyodorov asked.

His wife gave him back the empty box.

"You can show people the box! Who do you want to go flaunting your medal to? We all know, anyway, and you don't want to make people envious."

His mother came out with his daughter. Fyodorov took the girl in his arms to caress her and to leave his mother free to weep a little from joy.

"Some man in Bear Hill has been given a medal, too," his mother began, getting the better of her tears. "He brought back seven suits, two gramophones, and three watches. He had heaps of stuff with him—he needed a cart to get home from the station."

"I was given five suits, too," Fyodorov said.

"But he got seven!" the old woman repeated. "Anyway, where are these five suits of yours?"

"I only took one. You can't wear five suits all at once—first you have to wear one of them out."

His mother sat down on the floor, and his wife on the trunk.

"And how many gramophones were you given?" the old woman asked plaintively.

"I was given one, but I didn't take it. We've got one already."

"What about wristwatches?" his mother went on flatly.

"I was offered a wristwatch. But what do we want one for? Here at home we've got the pendulum clock, and at work I know the time from the trains—we've got a written timetable now!"

Mother and wife began to cry; Fyodorov wound up the gramophone, to entertain his little daughter with some music and because he wanted to have a listen himself.

"Where's Father?" he asked.

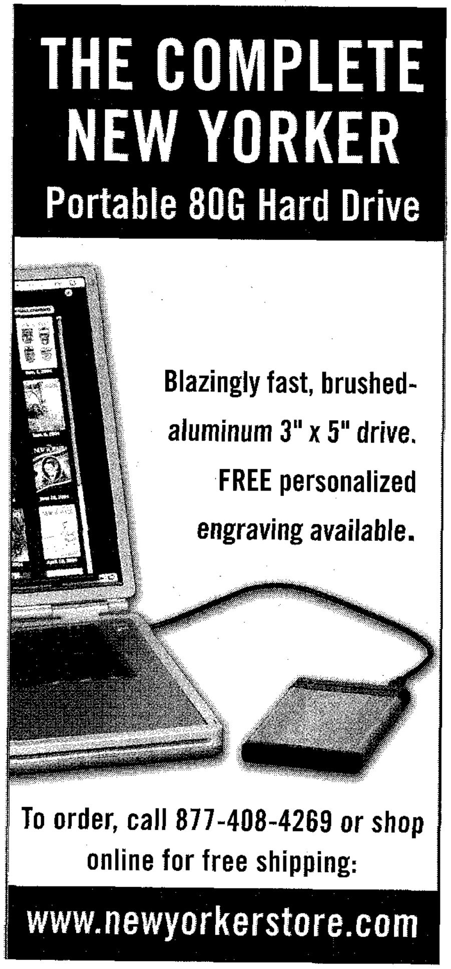
"Wasting cartridges in the forest," his mother answered without expression, through hot tears.

Fyodorov sat the child on his wife's knees, took out a clean handkerchief, and wiped Katerina Vasilievna's face. "Don't cry," he said. "I've brought you eight hundred grams of Moscow chocolates and a complete library for the beginner reader."

Then Fyodorov left the house and went into the forest to look for his father among animals and plants. ♦

—1936

(*Translated, from the Russian, by Robert and Elizabeth Chandler and Olga Meerson.*)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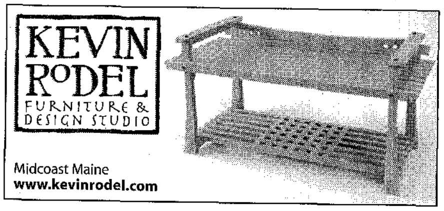
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MAN BEHIND THE CURTAIN

Peter Gelb tries to repackage the Metropolitan Opera.

BY REBECCA MEAD

Peter Gelb, the general manager of the Metropolitan Opera, slipped into his theatre's darkened auditorium just as Natalie Dessay, the French soprano, was losing her mind. It was a Friday afternoon in early September, with less than three weeks to go before opening night, and the company was rehearsing Donizetti's "Lucia di Lammermoor." The day's business was the so-called "mad scene," a milestone in the careers of divas from Maria Callas to Joan Sutherland, in which the heroine, having just stabbed to death the bridegroom to whom she has unwillingly been married, performs a demanding eighteen-minute aria. The title role in the new "Lucia," directed by Mary Zimmerman, was taken by Dessay, whose gaunt, wild-eyed visage had for the previous few days graced the sides of buses all over town, accompanied by the tagline "You'd be mad to miss it." Dessay whirled about the stage in a leotard and a long flounced skirt—a bloodied wedding gown was being readied for her in the costume shop—shying violently away from a massing horde of choristers and flinging herself against the bannister of a sweeping staircase, all the while delivering a frenzy of coloratura trills.

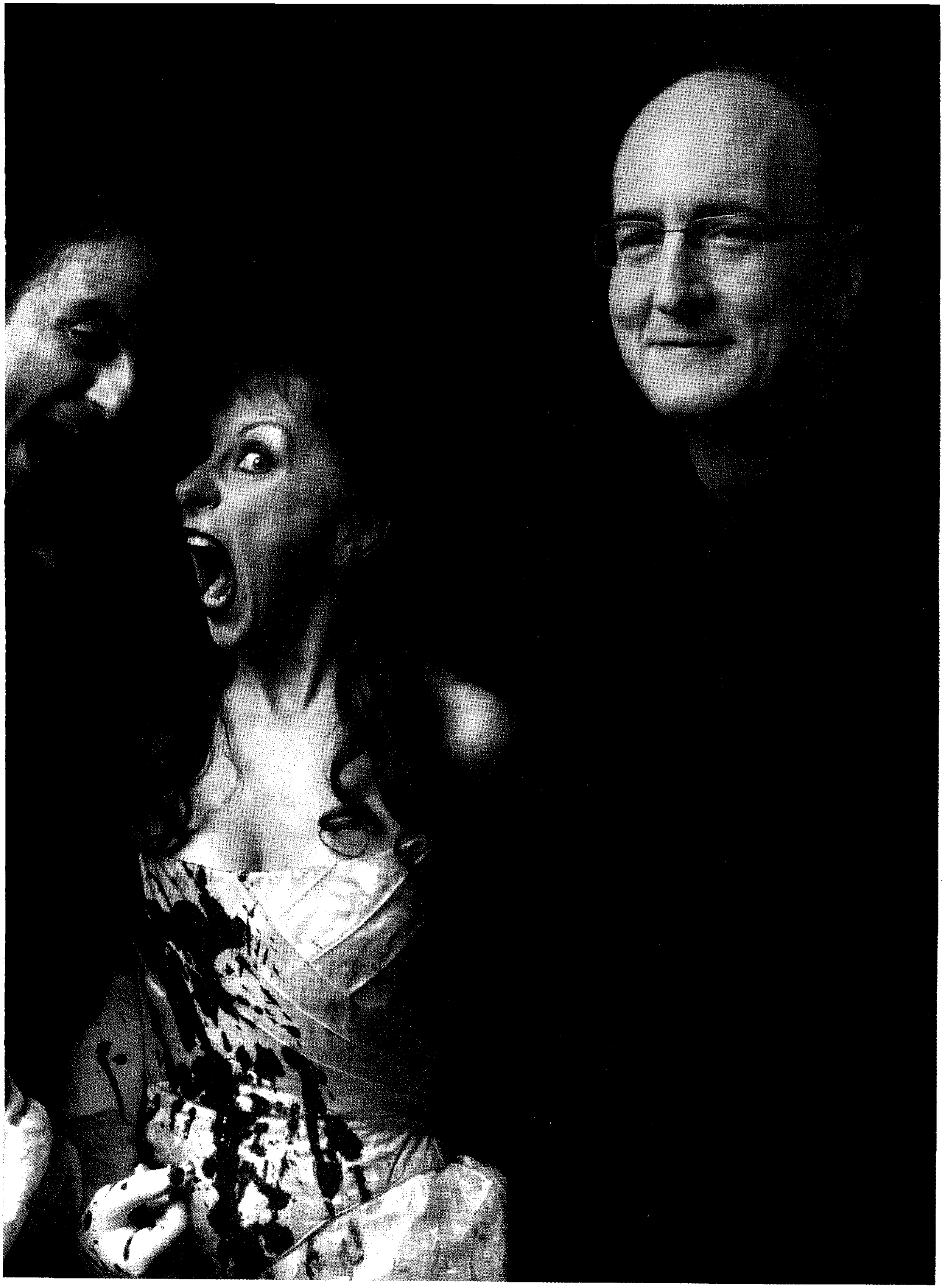
Gelb took the seat behind mine, and whispered, "Mary says that all Natalie's instincts are absolutely right. She's just a great actress." Director and singer were trying to decide how Lucia—who, in Zimmerman's production, receives a shot in the arm from a doctor halfway through the scene, and dissolves at high pitch into an opiate haze—should sing her final notes. They were experimenting with having her pass out as the scene ended, so that Dessay, who is as slight as a ballerina, would conclude the aria while being lifted in the arms of a chorus member. "It's a good thing Natalie's so light," Gelb said, as Dessay hit her concluding high E-flat while being borne aloft, her head thrown back and her arms and legs dangling. "It's a good thing it's not Joan Sutherland up there."

Gelb excused himself and went to the back of the house, to greet another star who had just made an appearance: Novak Djokovic, the Serbian tennis player, who, the previous evening, had triumphed in the men's semifinals at the U.S. Open. Dessay had been in the stands, and when she and Djokovic were introduced, after the match, he sang her the opening of "Don Giovanni." The Met's press office had arranged for Djokovic to attend the rehearsal, and when Dessay stopped singing Gelb led Djokovic onto the stage. Dessay shook his hand warmly, encouraged him to experiment with the acoustics of the house by delivering a few whoops, and prodded him to sing a few bars of Mozart, which he did enthusiastically and tunelessly. Over the next few days, photographs of Dessay and Djokovic appeared in all kinds of outlets that do not target the natural constituency of the Met, from the Los Angeles *Times'* sports pages to ESPN.com. By the eve of the opening night of "Lucia," a YouTube video of the encounter had been viewed more than thirty-five hundred times—almost enough to fill the opera house's thirty-eight hundred red velvet seats.

Gelb, who assumed the post of general manager in August, 2006, has sought to define his stewardship of the Met with two words: theatricality and openness. In his view, the Met, while still an institution of great glory, had in recent years become culturally irrelevant. His goal is to maintain its superlative musical values—he has told James Levine, the Met's musical director, that he would like him to remain in his post for the rest of his life—while reinvigorating its theatrical values, thereby building a broader audience.

Gelb's emphasis upon opera as theatre rather than as recital was immediately apparent. His first season opened with a stark, stylized "Madama Butterfly," di-

Gelb (at right, with Natalie Dessay and Mar



ordani) is seeking to run the Met with theatricality and openness. Photograph by Brigitte Lacombe.

"What does it look like, Sam? I'm running a little late this morning."

• •

rected by Anthony Minghella, in which Cio-Cio-San's son—typically played by a towheaded child—was instead incarnated by a Bunraku puppet. There was also a much praised "Il Barbiere di Siviglia," directed by Bartlett Sher, in which Count Almaviva made his first entrance from among the audience, as if he were a season-ticket holder struck with sudden inspiration, before strutting on a walkway built around the orchestra pit—a sundering of the fourth wall that amounts to daring innovation at the Met.

Meanwhile, Gelb has made extensive efforts at operatic outreach: inviting the public to "open house" dress rehearsals, complete with box lunches; broadcasting opening night onto the plaza at Lincoln Center and into Times Square; beaming several performances by satellite into movie theatres throughout the country, as well as to theatres in Canada, Europe, and Japan. He has established a rush-tickets program, with two hundred heavily discounted seats available at every weekday performance. In an attempt to forge links with the world of contemporary art, Gelb has opened a small gallery in a corner of the opera house's lobby, in which opera-related works, by artists including Chuck Close and Guillermo Kuitca, have been displayed. Gelb's innovations are not exactly transforming the core audience of the Met: this season, a quarter of the rush tickets have been set aside for senior citizens, since last year's marketing research indicated that many of those standing in line were retirees who used to pay full price at the Met but could no longer afford it. Nevertheless, his efforts are paying off at the box office, where revenue is up by seven per cent, after six years of decline. Through a combination of carefully cultivated artistic relations, and with a thoroughgoing comprehension of public relations, Gelb has achieved what two years ago seemed unimaginable: the Met—recently described by the *Times* as "perhaps the most exciting cultural institution in New York"—is hot. Gelb has been embraced as opera's most energetic champion and modernizer, a populist with class. "I've never seen anything like what he's done—to take something this large and rethink the institution," says Sher, who usually works in theatre (he directed "The Light in the Piazza"), and made his Met début with "Il Barbiere di Siviglia." "Peter has the rebel in him. He gets inside the clockwork enough, and is visionary enough, that he overthrows the Bastille in a quiet, effective way."

Gelb is, of necessity, more Mirabeau than Robespierre. The Met, which was founded in 1883 by aspiring social grandees for whom there was no room at the Academy of Music—Astors, Vanderbilts, Morgans, and Roosevelts—is an inherently aristocratic domain. Like all institutions of high culture in America, the Met depends upon the patronage of donors and private endowments for its survival: box-office receipts count for about half of its annual budget, which last year was two hundred and fifty million dollars. Two years ago, Sid Bass, the Texas billionaire industrialist, and his wife, Mercedes, gave the Met twenty-five million dollars; Mercedes Bass, for whom the opera house's Grand Tier was renamed, has since begun a five-year quest to raise a hundred and forty-five million dollars from her peers. Gelb's success has depended not only on persuading the social élite who support the Met to permit the opening of their hitherto well-guarded preserve but also on persuading them to enjoy it. Among the less obvious accomplishments of Gelb's first year as general manager has been his ability to balance his much heralded innovations with a less often acknowledged conservatism. In this, he may be the perfect impresario for this modern gilded age: He has convinced partygoers that they are attending a revolution, and has invited would-be revolutionaries to attend a party.

At the Villa Gallici, a four-star hotel in Aix-en-Provence, a maid spritzes the flagstones and rugs in the lobby with essence of lavender each morning, to insure the appropriate ambience. This is where Gelb stayed for two nights in July, in order to attend a production of Janáček's "From the House of the Dead," for which the Met is a co-producer; the production will come to New York in 2009. Another of Gelb's innovations as general manager has been to mount co-productions with other opera companies, giving the Met, in effect, the advantage of an out-of-town tryout. The director of "From the House of the Dead," Patrice Chéreau, is a well-known theatre and opera director in Europe who has never worked at the Met; joining forces with other companies was Gelb's way of bringing him to New York. "A gift I have is perspective," Gelb said, as he sat on the terrace under the shade of plane trees. "I don't have a lot of preconceived ideas about how you do things. To be successful as a producer—which is what I consider myself to be—you have to be able to think about lots of different aspects. Most people in the arts are either businesspeople or they are artistic people. Rarely are they both."

Before going to Aix, Gelb stopped in Basel to meet with the Swiss architects Jacques Herzog and Pierre de Meuron, best known for their conversion of the Bankside power station, in London, into the Tate Modern. In 2006, Herzog and de Meuron designed a production of "Tristan und Isolde" for the Berlin Staatsoper. "By their own admission, it had mixed artistic results, but I was really fascinated by what they did," Gelb said. "'Tristan' is an opera that delves deep into the subconscious, and they used this material that could look either completely opaque or translucent. As the opera progressed, poles and other objects started pushing through and piercing the surface." Herzog and de Meuron will create the set design for a production of Verdi's "Attila" in the 2009 season.

Gelb lacks the ostentation usually expected of the impresario. He has a confidential, understated manner, and his sense of humor is dry to the point of aridity. He is tall, but more likely to bend to an interlocutor's ear than he is to boom from a point of elevation. His only concession to flamboyance is a preference, when he attends the opening night of the Met's season, for a velvet tuxedo paired with a black shirt and a knotted tie. He has great charm without an excess of charisma. "He is one of these people who have the ability to be warm and cold at the same time," says André Bishop, the artistic director of Lincoln Center Theatre, with whom Gelb has initiated a program to commission new works from artists outside classical music, including Wynton Marsalis and Rufus Wainwright.

In temperament, Gelb could not be more different from his predecessor as general manager, Joseph Volpe, who started out as a stagehand at the Met and spent forty-two years there before his retirement, last year. Volpe's volatility was a well-practiced art. Once, the raven-haired soprano Angela Gheorghiu protested at the last minute the blond wig she was supposed to wear in a production of "Carmen"; Volpe told her, "The wig goes on, with or without you." (It did, on the head of an understudy.) Gelb, under similar circumstances, would probably have listened sympathetically to Gheorghiu's objections, drafted the Met's wig-master to bring the tresses down a tone or two, and persuaded Gheorghiu that playing a blonde had been her idea all along. Gelb believes in the power of the well-timed phone call, the intimate lunch date, the intercontinental flight. Dessay told me, "When he was hired, we had a lovely lunch in Trump Tower, and we talked about what roles I might play. With the Met, it was not like that before." A few days later, Gelb said, "Did she tell you that I also flew to Paris to take her out to lunch? I flew to Vienna to take Anna Netrebko out to lunch, too."

The composer Osvaldo Golijov, whom Gelb, in his first official commission, invited to collaborate on a new opera with Minghella, says, "One of the things I proposed was an opera of 'The Kingdom of This World,' by the Cuban novelist Alejo Carpentier. The next day, Peter had already read the book and understood it better than I did." (The idea of a Carpentier adaptation has since been dropped.) In June, Gelb flew Golijov to Botswana to discuss alternative concepts with Minghella, who was on location making a movie. "I said to Peter, 'Look, I don't know if anything will happen,' and he said, 'If nothing happens, at least you had a good time in Botswana,'" Golijov recalls. (For inspiration, Golijov and Minghella watched Henri-Georges Clouzot's movie "The Mystery of Picasso," which shows the painter at work. "We are not going to do an opera of Picasso," Golijov says. "We were looking for a deep emotion that has very little to do with the nineteenth-century emotion that is at the core of opera.")

Gelb is notorious among colleagues for his work habits, which involve pre-dawn e-mail sessions and a ruthless efficiency with time. "When you live in London, you have to wait for New York to wake up, but I think Peter is waiting for London to wake up," Minghella says. Bishop told me that, during the recent Lincoln Center production of Tom Stoppard's "The Coast of Utopia," Gelb, a regular theatregoer, had his assistant call "to find out the exact times of the intermissions, so that he could spend that twelve and three-quarters minutes profitably."

Gelb was an unlikely candidate for the Met's top job. He had never run an opera house; his background in classical music is largely in marketing, public relations, and artist management. He came to the Met from Sony, where he ran the classical-record division, and where his most often noted accomplishment had been releasing the soundtrack to "Titanic." He did have a long association with the Met—he had ushered there as a teen-ager and spent six years producing its telecasts, an arrangement that came to an end in 1993, after a clash with Volpe, who threatened to throw him across Lincoln Center plaza.

Gelb's return to the Met was just as precipitate as had been his ejection: Beverly Sills, who knew Gelb from his telecast days, suggested to the board that they meet with him; within forty-eight hours, he had signed a contract. "There were two areas in which we had a particular interest," William Morris, the president of the Met's board, says. "We wanted someone with a knowledge of marketing and promotion; and we wanted someone with a youthful vigor." (Gelb is fifty-three, a stripling by comparison with most Met board members.)

The relationship today between Gelb and his predecessor is publicly cordial, if circumspect. "Peter is a great salesman, a great P.R. guy," Volpe told me. "Music is eighty per cent of the opera, in my opinion, so in the years when I was general manager we put the emphasis on that. Now Peter comes in and he says, 'I have got to figure out how to attract new people, so I will look at the production side.'

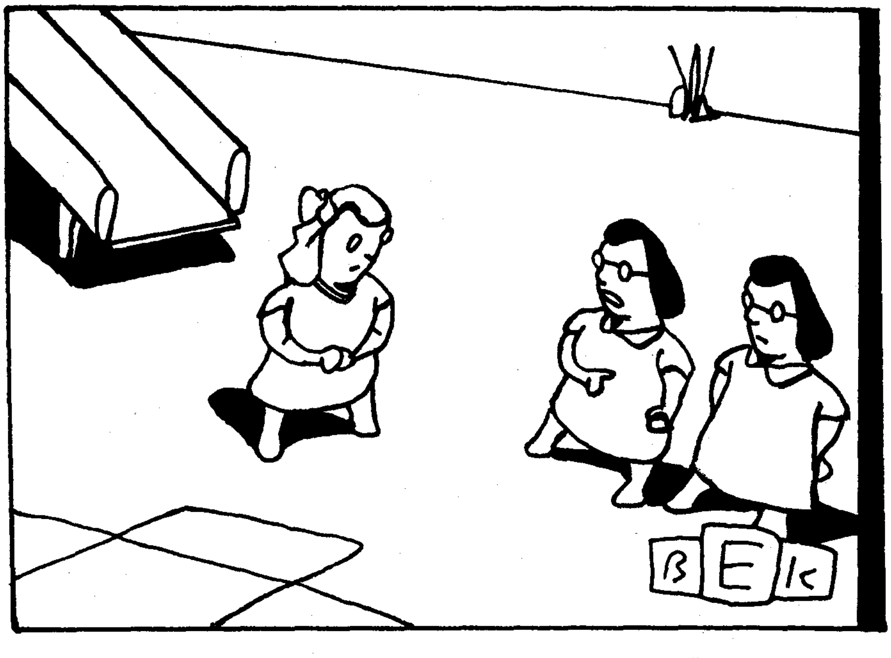
Anthony Minghella's 'Butterfly'—they did a heavy sell job on that, and it sold quite well, and I would say that right there the formula changed a bit between the music and the production. So for the old-time opera lovers who listen to the radio broadcasts, and listen to the music, it could be that they won't like the emphasis being changed, but maybe that is a necessity to attract new audiences. Time will tell."

Before becoming general manager, Gelb spent a year observing Volpe's management of the company's fifteen hundred employees, and laying plans for his own administration. With Volpe's help, he negotiated new-media agreements with the Met's three largest unions. Essentially, Gelb asked for, and was granted, the right to redistribute the Met's artistic productions—via high-definition transmissions, the Internet, satellite radio, CDs and DVDs, and any other digital medium—with the unions receiving a share of any future profits. Rob Maher, who was the chairman of the chorus committee during the union negotiations, says, "We were all skeptical at first. But he made it very clear: if you are not getting your product out there, you are destined to fail. And he sold us. We all knew something had to be done. There is nothing quite as clear as being onstage and seeing a house that is not full."

Much of Gelb's time that year was spent attracting fresh talent to the Met, such as Mary Zimmerman, who is making her début with "Lucia," and whose Broadway hit in 2002, "Metamorphoses"—in which the tales of Ovid were enacted in and around a wading pool—was just the kind of high-culture-based popular success that Gelb seeks to generate at the Met. (When Zimmerman expressed concerns about leaving her dog, Beary, alone in a rental apartment all day, Gelb granted her pet a free pass to the theatre.) He persuaded the Canadian director Robert LePage, whose productions have ranged from Shakespeare plays to a Cirque du Soleil show, to direct a new "Ring" cycle for the 2010 season. (One day in his office, Gelb showed me a computer simulation depicting part of LePage's proposed concept: when he pressed a button, the flat stage of the Met levitated and spun in parts on an axis, like a snippet of a strand of DNA.) He hired Richard Jones, the British director, to bring his macabre English-language version of "Hansel and Gretel" to play over the Christmas and New Year holiday period. (Gelb told me that Jones refers to the time-honored practice among opera singers merely to stand still and sing as "park and bark.") And when Pierre Boulez, the octogenarian French conductor, with whom Patrice Chéreau had been working on "From the House of the Dead," told Gelb that he would be too old to come to the Met in 2009, Gelb secured instead the Met début of the Finnish conductor Esa-Pekka Salonen.

Not every problem has been so deftly solved. One of Gelb's plans was to bring to the Met "Doctor Atomic," John Adams's opera about the Manhattan Project, in 2008. Adams would be paired with Peter Sellars, the celebrated American opera director, who wrote the libretto for "Doctor Atomic," and who conceived the original production, in 2005, at San Francisco Opera. "I wanted to put on a John Adams opera within the first couple of seasons of being here, and my intention was to put on 'Nixon in China,' but Peter and John persuaded me that I should look at 'Doctor Atomic,' which was still being written, and that it was John's newest, greatest work," Gelb recalls. "I saw the text, they sent me the score, and I listened to the music, and I thought it was very moving, very powerful. Then I went to San Francisco and I saw the production, and I was very disappointed. The music, I thought, was brilliant, but the production was undramatic. They had this bomb hanging on the stage in the second act. The whole thing was not realizing its potential." He says, "It wasn't presented in a way that would move people. I don't think anyone was moved by it." Gelb asked for revisions from Sellars, who ultimately withdrew, citing a scheduling conflict. "It is ironic, and sad in a way, because one of my goals when I came to the Met was to get Peter Sellars to direct here," Gelb says. "Doctor Atomic" will now be directed at the Met by Penny Woolcock, a British director who, in 2003, made a visceral film adaptation of Adams's opera "The Death of Klinghoffer."

In another rare misstep, Gelb's press office last April arranged for Ruth Ann Swenson, the soprano who had been a standby of Met productions, to be interviewed by the *Times* in advance of her appearance in "Giulio Cesare." Swenson told the paper that she had been sidelined by Gelb—in part, for being insufficiently photogenic. "I think I'm not skinny enough for him," she said. The interview seemed to confirm the suspicions of those who thought Gelb's enthusiasm for bringing opera into movie houses might lead to the Met hiring only those singers who would look good on the side of a bus, not those who might visually evoke the back of one. In August, before an audience at the Chautauqua Institution, in



"Oh, we know each other from the womb."

"What other tricks does he need?"

upstate New York, Gelb clarified his position without shifting it. "She's a very fine singer, but there are also many, many new singers coming up," he said. Of the *Times* piece, he said, "What may have been somewhat falsely conveyed in that was that I wanted only to populate the stage of the Met in the future with beautiful, svelte singers. . . . What I'm interested in is finding great artists. Great artists are those who have in their vocal delivery and in their stage presence and in their acting the combination of all those elements." Swenson told me via e-mail, "I was very happy at the Met and look forward to performing there again in the near future."

In Aix, Gelb described himself as "a sort of artistic marriage broker." His preference is to hire directors he trusts and relinquish control to them. He does give notes, though. For "Lucia," he suggested that the lighting designer, T. J. Gerckens, was too often tracking the performers with a spotlight—a technique that Gelb finds "old-fashioned." And he urged Marcello Giordani, the tenor who played Lucia's beloved Edgardo, to "avoid the too big, silent-film gestures that opera singers sometimes fall victim to on the big stage of the Met."

There are risks in brokering marriages between theatre directors who have little experience with opera and singers who expect that directors will be familiar with the demands of their art. Dessay, who initially trained as a stage actress, says that theatre directors who step into opera sometimes have an inadequate understanding of the music's imperative over the unfolding of the action. "The director has to treat the time as it is in the music, not as we would like it to be," she says. "We have to follow the music, and fill the time honestly and believably." When, on the first day of rehearsals for "Lucia," Zimmerman showed models of the sets, Giordani expressed surprise that the set of a parlor, where the marriage-contract-signing scene would take place, had no ceiling—an acoustical tool. "Are you concerned about that?" Zimmerman asked. "Is he a singer?" a cast member said.

In 2009, Gerard Mortier, the director of the Paris National Opera, will leave France to run the New York City Opera. Mortier is known for his support of *Regietheater*, in which operas are often interpreted through the lens of contemporary culture and politics. (As the head of the Salzburg Festival, which he ran from 1991 to 2001, Mortier notoriously produced a "Fledermaus" that depicted the rise of neo-Nazism in Austria.) His appointment, last spring, seemed to augur a kind of operatic-hipness face-off, with Gelb and Mortier vying to appear the more vital and relevant. So far, Mortier's plans are promising: a production of Olivier Messiaen's "St. Francis of Assisi," designed by the Russian artist Ilya Kabakov, is scheduled to be performed at the Park Avenue Armory; this much admired but mammoth work has never been staged in New York.

Mortier, whom I visited in Paris this summer, said that the smaller size and budget of the City Opera, relative to that of the Met, would permit him to be more experimental, and that his artistic approach would be quite different from that adopted by Gelb. "As a European, I believe enormously in opera as an actor of our contemporary society," he said. "In New York, and in America, opera is seen only as entertainment." Mortier said that, while he admired what Gelb had been doing to open up the Met, "he works very much on the package—how you present what you are doing." (The City Opera has, however, started working on its own package: a recent ad in the *Times* implicitly took on the Met, boasting, "Our casts are younger singers who are great actors and who look the role. Both for opera veterans and opera newcomers, our 'Bohème' is the one to see.")

In Aix, Gelb said of Mortier, "He is a different kind of producer than I am. He is the opera-intendant version of Christo—he likes to create this canvas of controversy." He noted that Mortier had been responsible for some admirable productions, and said that he saw no threat to the Met's preëminence. "People have different ideas of what is exciting," he said. "I am very confident about the long-range plans of what is coming to the Met, and I think Gerard probably wishes some of them were his."

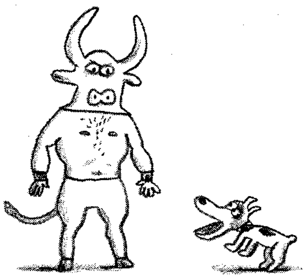
Even as Gelb develops more adventurous productions, he has taken care to reassure conservative patrons whose idea of a good night at the opera includes a massive set teeming with choristers and animals, of the sort so often conjured there by Franco Zeffirelli and Otto Schenk. (Bruce Crawford, a former general manager of the Met, who now heads the board's executive committee, jokes that there are "people who are afraid that maybe there won't be helmets in 'Siegfried.' ") Gelb has taken to referring to Jack O'Brien, the theatre director who made his Met début last season with an amiably overstuffed production of "Il Trittico," as "the American Zeffirelli." And he issues frequent reminders that his pursuit of Hollywood and Broadway directors echoes the strategy of Rudolf Bing, the Met's general manager in the fifties and sixties. (Bing was the institution's great modernizer, overseeing the move to Lincoln Center and pioneering the telecasts, as well as bringing Placido Domingo, Birgit Nilsson, and Renata Tebaldi to its stage. For the manager of an opera house to claim that he is merely stepping in the footsteps of Bing is rather like a Presidential candidate suggesting that he is only doing what John F. Kennedy might have done.)

As for those much loved productions, Gelb has his own plans. "I promised the Met subscribers when I first came on board—well, I didn't promise anything, but I did say that there were two iconic Zeffirelli productions, 'Bohème' and 'Turandot,' and that the other Zeffirelli productions are going to be replaced," he says. "A lot of these things are just sitting there like lead weights, so there is a lot of catching up to do." The first to go will be "Tosca," which is being replaced by a new production by Luc Bondy, the Swiss theatre and opera director. "Everyone loves the Zeffirelli 'Tosca,'" Gelb says, carefully. "There are three acts in 'Tosca,' and the set for each one is based on a real location in Rome. It's a tourist wonder."

Even Gelb's mothballing of Zeffirelli has been executed with finesse. After leaving Aix, Gelb went to visit the director, who is now eighty-four. "It was fantastic," Gelb says. "He lives in this huge villa complex on the outskirts of Rome, with this pack of about ten dogs that have free rein, and various assistants." Gelb's house call was a follow-up to a phone conversation six months earlier, in which he asked Zeffirelli if he would be willing to be honored at the Metropolitan Opera Guild's annual luncheon at the Waldorf-Astoria. "He would also be here for the revival, in the same period, of 'Bohème,' which is the quintessential Zeffirelli production, and I said that he could supervise, and we would honor him onstage," Gelb says. Naturally, Zeffirelli was charmed at the suggestion. "I was there for about an hour," Gelb says. "He had wonderful pictures, and we talked about his various knighthoods, and so on. It was funny. We reminisced about the good old days."

The first time Peter Gelb went to the Metropolitan Opera was in 1967, a year after the company had moved from its old theatre, on Thirty-ninth Street, to Lincoln Center. The production was "Carmen," and Gelb witnessed it from the box of Rudolf Bing. Bing had invited as his guest Arthur Gelb, Peter's father, who was then the metropolitan and cultural editor of the *Times*, and who went on to become the newspaper's managing editor. "While we were applauding, two men started booing someone's performance, and Bing went down and had them removed," Arthur Gelb recalls. "Peter was so impressed, and he said, 'That's a job I'd like to have someday.'" (Gelb's version of the anecdote is slightly less honed, though he does allow that Bing's actions were far more interesting to him than was the singing.)

Gelb was the child of cultural privilege: not only was his father a highly placed editor; his mother, Barbara Gelb, a writer, was the niece of Jascha Heifetz, the violinist, and the stepdaughter of S. N. Behrman, the author and playwright. During Gelb's elementary-school years, the family lived on the Upper East Side, and Gelb was a witness to his parents' vivid social life. "I remember seeing 'Hamlet' when I was about five years old, and seeing Joe Papp's production of 'The Taming of the Shrew' in Central Park before the Delacorte Theatre was built," Gelb says. "My father was at one point a night-club critic, and he and my mother would come home late at night with all these great stories about comics and chanteuses, and bring me swizzle sticks from all the night clubs." After a four-year sojourn in the suburbs during the middle-school years of Peter and his older brother, Michael, the Gelbs moved in 1967 to the storied Apthorp Building, on the Upper West Side. Here, Arthur and Barbara held parties at which guests included Mayor John Lindsay and Governor Nelson Rockefeller. (The senior Gelbs still live in the apartment, which contains a rocking horse that their younger son used to ride on while declaring himself "Peter Gelb, young cowboy," and a photograph taken shortly after his ascension to general manager, which Gelb has inscribed, "With all my love & gratitude for the DNA and for teaching me to think big.")



"Access was more important than wealth, and I had a sense of that," Gelb says. "I met all these important people, and could go and see any show that I wanted to see. In the days when gift-giving was acceptable among journalists, my father was showered with perks that he would share with me and my brother." (Michael Gelb, who renovates houses for a living and is also an artist, lives in Massachusetts.) "I remember he had a pass to the Palm Court at the Plaza Hotel, which enabled me to go and have free drinks there when I was seventeen."

To his parents' dismay, Gelb refused to go to college. Instead, he got a job, at his father's intercession, as a mailroom clerk for Sol Hurok, the classical-music impresario. "Hurok was a total showman," Gelb says. "He used to carry a silver-tipped cane and wear a fedora hat and an opera cape. He kept an eye out for me because of my father. I used to watch him pinch his secretary's bottom when she would remove his opera cape when he arrived at work." Gelb was working in Hurok's office when, in 1972, a bomb exploded there; it was believed to have been planted by the Jewish Defense League to protest Hurok's work with Soviet artists. A secretary was killed in the attack. Arthur Gelb recalls, "I was in a page-one meeting and someone came in and said, 'You have to come out, it involves your son.' I told Peter he should come right over and I would assign someone to the story, and he could draw a diagram of the office layout. So he came over, reeking of smoke, and drew this diagram." After spending a year at Hurok's, Gelb went to work for the artist-management firm Gurtman & Murtha; then, in 1973, he finally started college, at Yale, where, in addition to being a student, he was the director of information for the Yale School of Music. He spent a single semester at col-

MARRIAGE

All week they've been by the sea again
and the sound of the sea colors everything.
Blue sky fills the window.
But the only sound is the sound of the waves pounding the shore—
angry. Angry at something. Whatever it is
must be why he's turned away. Angry, though he'd never hit her,
never say a word, probably.

So it's up to her to get the answer some other way,
from the sea, maybe, or the gray clouds suddenly
rising above it. The smell of the sea is in the sheets,
the smell of sun and wind, the hotel smell, fresh and sweet
because they're changed every day.

He never uses words. Words, for him, are for making arrangements,
for doing business. Never for anger, never for tenderness.

She strokes his back. She puts her face up against it,
even though it's like putting your face against a wall.

And the silence between them is ancient: it says
these are the boundaries.

He isn't sleeping, not even pretending to sleep.
His breathing's not regular: he breathes in with reluctance;
he doesn't want to commit himself to being alive.
And he breathes out fast, like a king banishing a servant.

Beneath the silence, the sound of the sea,
the sea's violence spreading everywhere, not finished, not finished,
his breath driving the waves—

But she knows who she is and she knows what she wants.
As long as that's true, something so natural can't hurt her.

—Louise Glück

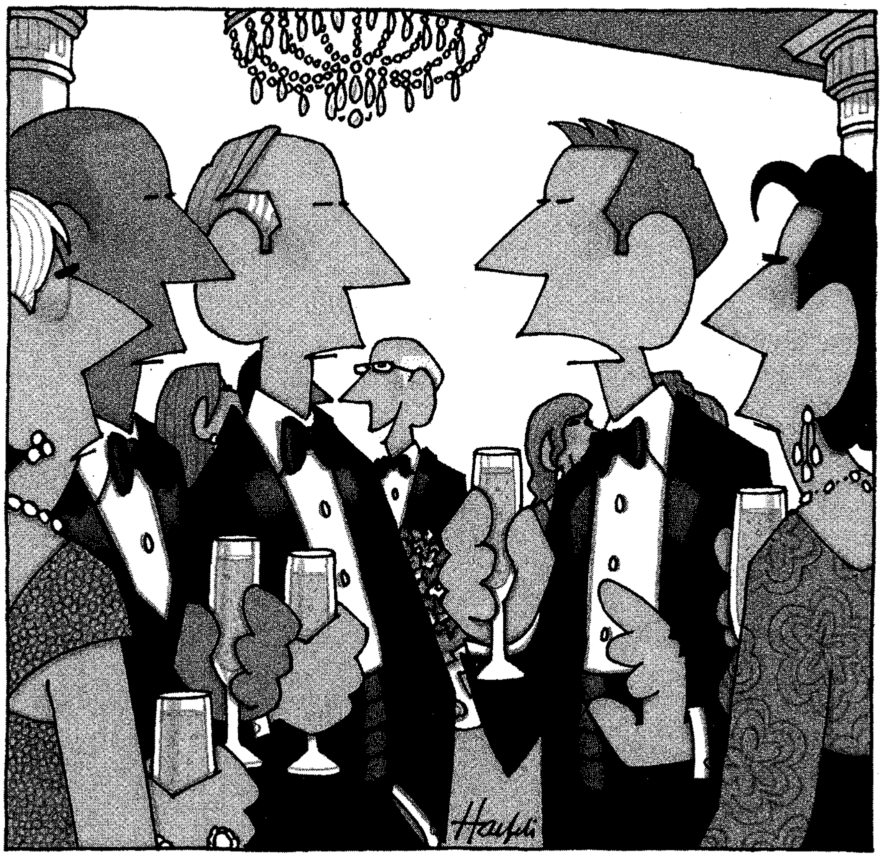
lege, and says that he would have left sooner had it not been for obligations to the music school.

He returned to Gurtman & Murtha, and forged the professional bond that defined his career for the next fifteen years. "In 1974, there was a small announcement in the paper about Vladimir Horowitz making one of his comebacks—he was always retiring and returning—in Cleveland," Gelb says. "I called up Harold Shaw, his then manager, and said, 'If I were Horowitz, I wouldn't be happy about making a comeback and having just a paragraph in the newspaper. I would want it to be a great story.' Shaw said that Horowitz would never consider paying a press agent, but he also said that he would consider paying for me himself. So I met Horowitz and his wife, Wanda, and they liked me, because of my pedigree, with Heifetz, and they weren't paying for me anyway, so they were perfectly happy to see how I did."

Horowitz was planning to play a recital at the Met—the first and only pianist ever to make a solo appearance there—and Gelb's first publicity gambit was to hold a press conference in the East Side town house of the supposedly reclusive pianist. ("It was sort of like the Met; nobody thought they could have access to him, but nobody ever asked," Gelb says.) He followed that up by offering Harold Schonberg, the classical-music critic of the *Times*, exclusive access to a visit by Horowitz to the Met in advance of the concert. "Horowitz checked out the Met to see if he approved the acoustics, but he knew ahead of time he was going to do it—he was just being coy," Gelb says. Such coyness landed Horowitz on the *Times'* front page.

As Gelb steered the career of Horowitz, becoming his manager, he received an education in the handling of the artistic personality. "He was the greatest artist I had ever encountered, and I realized it was O.K., and appropriate, to do what I could to help make him function as a performer," Gelb says. "I also understood that he was not eccentric, he was crazy. He genuinely needed to be treated in a kind of clinical way, and that is how I won his trust, because I took his fears about his well-being very seriously." When Horowitz insisted that he would go overseas to play in England only if invited by the Prince of Wales, Gelb procured a meeting for himself at Buckingham Palace with the Prince's equerry, who informed him that it would be against protocol for the Prince to issue such an invitation but that he would be delighted to attend a concert, should Horowitz give one. "Horowitz told everyone that he had been invited," Gelb recalls.

In 1986, Gelb persuaded Horowitz to agree to tour in Russia, which he had left in 1925, by assuring him that all the comforts of home would be provided. "He was completely obsessed with his diet, and he had to have exactly the same food for every meal," Gelb says. "I literally promised him that I would re-create his diet and the ambience of his New York town house in Moscow at the height of the Cold War. The American Ambassador was a great music lover, and he and his wife moved into a back room and gave the Horowitzes their bedroom. At the time, Horowitz ate only Dover sole, and so I organized these various ambassadors to supply his food needs. The British Ambassador was assigned Dover-sole responsibilities; the Italian Ambassador was responsible for his fresh-asparagus needs." The tour was a triumph, and Horowitz was so delighted by the rapturous reaction of audiences that he took to speaking only in Russian, even to his monolingual manager. It took the Russian tour to reveal the limits of Gelb's so-



"You can't learn the path to financial independence from just any infomercial."

licitude: when the Chernobyl nuclear reactor exploded while the Horowitz caravan was in Leningrad, Gelb, who had brought his then wife, Donna, and their two-year-old son along on the trip, implored an unwilling Horowitz to leave the country. After failing to persuade the pianist, Gelb, having already dispatched his family to Western Europe, got on a plane himself, leaving Horowitz to his own devices. "He was an old man," Gelb says. "And he was very cheerful about it. He didn't care."

An important part of Gelb's role was to reinforce, through exaggerated deference, the fragile self-absorption of Horowitz and Wanda, the daughter of Arturo Toscanini. "I had dinner with them once a week," Gelb says. "Part of my duties was to talk to them and take them out. I had always called him Mr. Horowitz, but his friends called him Volodya. At one point, shortly before Horowitz died, he was in a very expansive, affectionate mood, and he said to me, 'You know, you're like a member of our family. I don't think you should call me Mr. Horowitz anymore. You should call me Maestro.'" After Horowitz died, in 1989, Gelb's last managerial act was to insure that the pianist was buried in the Toscanini family tomb, in a Catholic cemetery in Milan, by claiming that Horowitz, although Jewish, had been on the verge of conversion.

While managing Horowitz's career, Gelb was also developing his own: in 1978, he became the publicity director for the Boston Symphony Orchestra, under Seiji Ozawa. Ozawa, who is of Japanese descent, was born in China, and, in 1979, he and Gelb planned a tour of China by the orchestra, the first visit by an American performing-arts group since the end of the Cultural Revolution. Gelb persuaded Pan Am to provide a 747, the first ever to fly into China. (A staircase for disembarking had to be brought from Hong Kong.) Gelb made good use of the seats not filled by members of the orchestra. He recalls, "I had gone to China and said innocently to the Foreign Minister, 'Do you mind if we bring a few journalists?' and he said, 'Sure, China is open to everybody.' No Western journalists had been in China for years, and they gave me these stacks of red press credentials."

Gelb struck a deal with CBS News whereby a documentary team would make a film about the orchestra. Howard Stringer, who was then a producer at CBS and is now the head of Sony, says, "It was his idea—he said they were going to tour China, and that we could see it as a keyhole into the Cultural Revolution." (Gelb's success in drumming up publicity in New York for an out-of-town orchestra did not go without notice, or without the suggestion that his family tie at the newspaper of record was helpful. Peter J. Davis, the classical-music critic, who worked at the *Times* in the seventies, says, "There was a big joke at the paper when he was doing publicity for the Boston Symphony Orchestra that a missile could fall out of the sky and the headline would read 'RUSSIAN MISSILE FALLS TO GROUND; MISSES TANGLEWOOD.'")

In 1982, Gelb joined Columbia Artists Management Inc., and began producing television shows and film documentaries, among them "Karajan in Salzburg," a chronicle of the Austrian conductor at work. He featured artists such as Yo-Yo Ma and Kathleen Battle, who in 1994 was publicly dispatched from the Met by Volpe after being accused of unprofessional behavior. Battle's allegiance to Gelb is such that she sang at his second wedding, to Keri-Lynn Wilson, a conductor, which took place in Sardinia four years ago. (After being appointed general manager, Gelb invited Battle to a party at his home, and suggested that she might return to the Met. Battle declined the suggestion. "She told me that for ten years, every time she walked down Broadway, she crossed to the other side of the street rather than set foot on Lincoln Center property," he says.)

In 1993, Gelb helped arrange for Norio Ohga, the president of Sony, who was also an amateur conductor, to make his début in New York. With Gelb's assistance, Sony secured Avery Fisher Hall for a private concert, and engaged off-duty members of the Met and Philharmonic orchestras. (Gelb says that he urged Sony not to seek the attention of the press for this endeavor; when the company nonetheless did so, the critical reception was disparaging, with the Associated Press comparing the concert to "a baseball fantasy camp for someone who once had aspirations of becoming a classical musician.") Within a week, Gelb was invited to work for Sony's classical label.

He joined the company, having been assured that he would also be able to produce movies for Sony Pictures in Hollywood. This proved to be no less of a fantasy than Ohga's appearance at Lincoln Center. "I went out to Hollywood to meet with Peter Guber, then the head of Sony Pictures, who was obviously reluctant to meet me because he felt he was being pressured into it," Gelb says. "I told him I wanted to produce films that had classical music as a central theme. He asked me if I had taken a stupid pill." (Guber says that he does not recall ever meeting Gelb.)

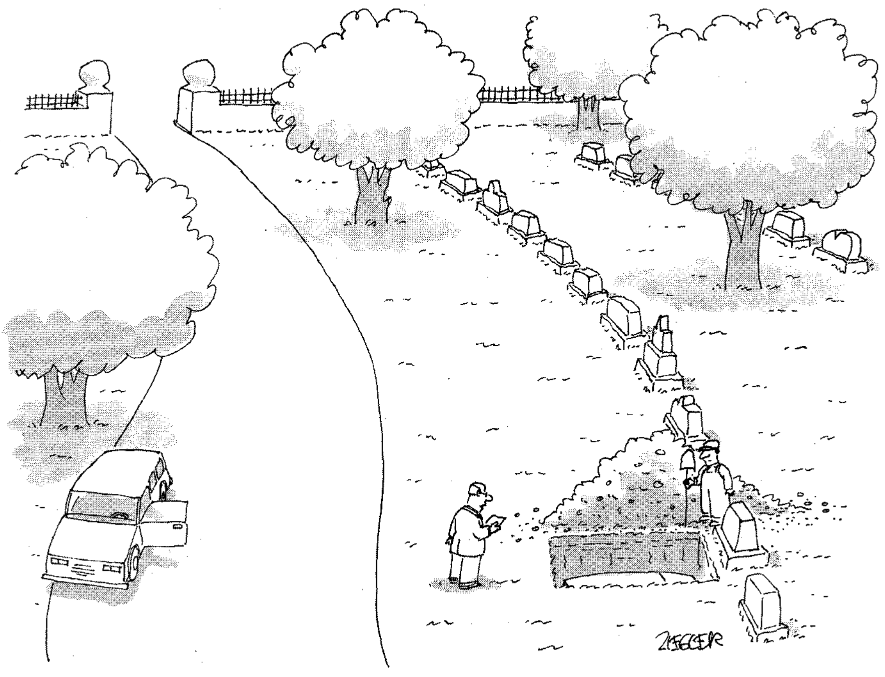
Instead, Gelb focussed on remaking the classical division, which, like other classical labels, was dwindling in significance and revenues. Originally, Gelb was hired to generate new projects for Sony in America, while Günther Breest, the head of Sony's classical-music division, would continue to run the label from Hamburg. But, Breest says, "there was a dispute between the U.S. way of running a classical-record company and the way that I was thinking it should be run." By 1995, the Hamburg offices had been shuttered, and Gelb had replaced Breest.

Under Gelb, Sony Classical sought to reach a wider audience through crossover projects, among them "Voice of an Angel," a 1998 album by Charlotte Church, a thirteen-year-old schoolgirl from Wales. Gelb commissioned classical composers to write film scores, including John Corigliano, who wrote the music for the 1998 film "The Red Violin." For the release of "Fantasia 2000," he hired James Levine to conduct the soundtrack. In the move that was to define his tenure at Sony, Gelb bought James Horner's soundtrack to "Titanic," which sold twenty-nine million copies worldwide.

In 1997, the year that "Titanic" was released, Gelb gave a speech at an industry conference in Hamburg, entitled "Hope for the Future of Classical Records." The closing of Sony's Hamburg office, he said, "marked the end of making classical recordings without attention to the public's desires." Gelb attacked a "cabal of atonal composers, academics, and classical-music critics" whose tastes, he asserted, were being imposed on a public hungry for more melodic fare. "For far too long, classical-music audiences had been subjected to—and sometimes suffered through—an almost exclusive diet of new music that was atonal and difficult to enjoy," he said, and announced that "a programming revolution must take place in the concert hall, in the orchestras, in the opera houses. For the first time in years, serialism is going to have to start sharing space on concert halls with new music of broader appeal."

The speech was seen by some in the classical-music establishment as evidence of Gelb's commercially driven lunge for the middlebrow. (Writing in the *Times*, the composer Matthias Kriesberg said that when Gelb addressed a group in Salzburg in similar terms "he was asked incredulously which composers were supposed to step aside.") Even on Gelb's terms, his efforts at Sony Classical were only partly successful—the label continued to founder even as Gelb signed Joe Jackson to record his "Symphony No. 1"—but his philosophy, he says, remains consistent. "What irked me at the time was that there were many critics and leaders of orchestras who actually believed that this music was popular, in spite of the fact that the audience wasn't there," he says. "I felt it was my duty to point that out, much to their dismay and disagreement. What I am saying today is not that much different. There is a danger, whether you are running a record label or an orchestra or an opera house, of not understanding who the public is. It doesn't mean you should pander to the public, but you should understand that there *is* a public. You can't operate an opera house in a vacuum, and I think more often than not that is how opera houses operate."

Gelb's apartment is in a landmarked building a few blocks from Lincoln Center, and is handsomely appointed with antique furniture and an ornate chandelier that Gelb commissioned from a glassblower in Murano; a sliver of Central Park is visible from one window. There are also various mementos. On a side table, near Keri-Lynn Wilson's baby-grand piano, there is a framed letter from Horowitz: "My dear manager, or Peter Gelb, or friend—Till now we did well. Now let's make more *money!*" In Gelb's study, there is a poster for "Fantasia 2000," signed by Roy Disney, and a sheet of music signed by John Williams and headed "The Gelb Version"—an iteration of the music Gelb commissioned from Williams for "Star Wars Episode I: The Phantom Menace." In a framed photograph, Gelb is pictured alongside Pope John Paul II, a recording



"There were those who hated his guts—but not me."

THE COUPLE WHO ADOPTED AN ADULT CHILD
It's great! He's trained, he sleeps through the night, he walks, he talks—he can even play the piano!
AND he brings in an income!

of whose homilies, accompanied by a New Age soundtrack, Sony released in 1999. Another relic of Gelb's tenure at Sony is a well-stocked wine cabinet. "Since I've been working at the Met, I have a different financial outlook, so I don't buy fancy wine anymore," he said. There are no tokens of "Titanic," which paid for a lot of that wine. "That was just luck, commercial luck, but it has nothing to do with who I am," Gelb said. "Well, it does have something to do with who I am—it was appropriate for what I was charged to do at the time. But there is a reason why I left the record business."

One afternoon at the Met, Gelb led me up the sweeping staircase from the lobby to the recently renamed Mercedes T. Bass Grand Tier. "Can't miss it," he said, nodding at the brass lettering above the windows facing Lincoln Center plaza.

While Gelb's public efforts have been directed toward updating the Met's cultural profile and attracting new audiences, a significant portion of his private efforts have involved attending to the ideas and opinions of Mrs. Bass. "This form of art has always relied upon patronage," he said. "For the Met to break even purely at the box office, we would have to more than double our ticket prices, which are already astronomical. A one-hundred-and-seventy-five-dollar ticket in the orchestra would have to be four hundred dollars." Courting the Met's wealthy board members is thus as important a part of Gelb's job as visiting directors and lunching sopranos. "Mercedes has been very outspoken," Gelb said. "She gives me opinions about everything, but she understands that she is not running the Met. Although she has said—somewhat jokingly, although I think she may partly mean it—that she sometimes does wish she was running the Met."

"Peter is quite unique, and unexpectedly unique," Mercedes Bass told me one day last summer, at lunch in Aspen. "Without doubt he is an intelligent man, but running an opera house like that—it is not easy." She ordered a hamburger, and two different brands of mineral water, one flat and one sparkling, which she blended in one glass to achieve the desired degree of effervescence. "You have got to be creative, plus you have got to be a diplomat, plus you have to be a manager. But I admire his mind. He knows the need of the public, and that, I think, is fascinating." She said that she had been taken aback when Gelb's name was first put to the board. "I thought, Oh, there's a man who doesn't have a clue about how to run an opera company!" she said. "But then Beverly Sills, bless her heart, said, 'Mercedes, don't worry, you will love him.' And I must say she was right. And I think we all love him on the board. The first impression was that he had so much vision, and we were not used to so much vision."

The twenty-five-million-dollar donation was, Bass said, in part a farewell present to Joe Volpe, and in part a welcome gift to Gelb. "I was worried about where the future of the Met would go," Bass said. "I said to Sid, 'Sooner or later we are going to do something for the Met,' and he said, 'Well, what's your thinking?' I said, 'Well, if you really want to give me a great Christmas present, this is what I would like to do.' The whole decision took about five minutes. I said to him, 'Let's make it Christmas, Valentine, birthday.' He said, 'You've already cashed in until you're ninety.' "

Bass said that she was thrilled with Gelb's attempts to bring a new audience into the Met, and that she understood what a commitment a night out at the opera could be. "Opera is somewhat of an acquired taste, and it is very time-consuming—you need to have three or four hours to devote to it," she said. "And then, to a certain degree you have to have the finances. I am very aware that for a couple to go to the opera, it means basically a hairdresser, a babysitter, a taxi or car, dinner on the Grand Tier. All of that mounts up to being sort of an expensive evening." She was impressed by Gelb's efforts to provide a less expensive experience, although she had reservations about the high-definition broadcasts. "When the camera is too much in the mouth of the singers, it bothers me," she said. "I think it is unflattering for the artist. I don't think we need to look down their throats. Even if you are in the front row of the Met, you don't see that."

Bass said that she had not been shy

about expressing her opinions on matters operatic to Gelb, who had urged her to call at any time. "One of my first major conversations I had with Peter was to say, please, don't get rid of the old Zeffirelli productions," she said. "My example was that one cannot appreciate contemporary or modern art if you don't begin with the 'Mona Lisa' or the Old Masters. Zeffirelli productions are mind-boggling, and I still go to all of them, and when I hear the audience gasp in the second act of 'Tosca,' or in 'Bohème,' that, to me, is the experience of going to the opera." She had suggested to Gelb that the Met at some point might mount a Zeffirelli marathon. "He said it is possible," she said. "He basically doesn't say no."

There are elements of Gelb's vision, Bass said, from which she will excuse herself, such as "From the House of the Dead," which, when I saw it in Aix, was monumental and grimly compelling. "I don't think I am going to see it, frankly," Bass said. " 'Peter Grimes' is another one." (John Doyle, who directed "Sweeney Todd" on Broadway in 2005, is making his Met début with the Benjamin Britten opera, later this season.) "There are certain operas I can live without," she said. "But that's all right. There are other audiences that will love them."

On the opening night of the 2007 season at the Metropolitan Opera, the weather was clear and mild: perfect conditions for an evening spent watching "Lucia" in one of the nearly three thousand folding chairs that had been set up on Lincoln Center plaza, or the fifteen hundred seats in Times Square. Inside the opera house, some patrons wore furs, while for others low-cut haute couture sufficed. Mercedes Bass, dressed in a champagne-colored lace gown by Oscar de la Renta, declared herself delighted by the turnout. "We never had a red carpet at the Met before, but this is our East Coast Oscars," she said, after running the gantlet of camera crews taking photographs of celebrity guests, including Calvin Klein, Bianca Jagger, Jane Fonda, and David Schwimmer. (Not every guest was familiar with red-carpet protocol: one older gentleman in a tuxedo clutched a crumpled paper bag from the Metropolitan Museum. "That shouldn't be allowed!" Bass admonished.) Before the curtain rose on the opera, Gelb appeared onstage and asked for a moment of silence in remembrance of Beverly Sills and Luciano Pavarotti. (Sills died in July, Pavarotti in September.) For a few seconds, even the clearing of throats ceased, a courtesy rarely extended to a living singer. The orchestra played "The Star-Spangled Banner," and the audience members rose and joined their voices to the swell; Bass, in her center parterre box, looked on like the monarch for whom the anthem was being sung.

Mary Zimmerman's staging of "Lucia," which she had transposed from the eighteenth century to the nineteenth, was elegant and stylized, although, perhaps in a nod to Met animal-husbandry traditions of realism, the first scene included a pair of loping wolfhounds. She had devised inventive stage business not included in the libretto: the noiseless appearance, during Lucia's first aria, of a ghost, the spirit of the dead maiden about whom Lucia is singing; the transformation of the opera's celebrated sextet—in which the six main characters each carry on an internal monologue—into a portrait-photography sitting; and the reappearance of Lucia, after her death, as a wan, silent ghoul, leading Edgardo to turn the knife upon himself. This last was a touch of melodrama that some reviewers and bloggers found de trop; but given that the opera is based on a novel by Walter Scott—the Dan Brown of his day—Zimmerman had struck just the right note of vulgarity.

There was no parking and barking by Natalie Dessay, who was so kinetic in her first scene that she stumbled as she skipped across faux heathland on the raked stage; tumbling into an unchoreographed seated position, she continued gamely with the aria. At the scene's conclusion, having been helped back to her feet by a fellow-performer, Dessay leaned against the edge of the proscenium and mugged for the audience as it delivered a long, appreciative ovation. During the mad scene, Dessay raved with even more intensity than she had shown Novak Djokovic, although on this occasion she concluded her final aria before collapsing, a high E-flat being tricky for even the most agile soprano to deliver while prone. The cast came out for repeated curtain calls; then, with the cameras still transmitting the action to the plaza outside and to Times Square, the singers emerged onto a balcony overlooking the plaza, where they were applauded by the thousands of viewers there. It was a gesture that André Bishop called "worthy of P. T. Barnum."

Dinner was served afterward, for those wealthy enough to pay or famous enough not to have to, in tents pitched over Damrosch Park. The décor (bare branches evocative of Zimmerman's sets) and menu (heirloom chicken in lemon-and-thyme sauce, and molten chocolate cake) had been supervised by Mercedes Bass, who sat at a central table, her emerald earrings gleaming in the candlelight. Christine Hunter, the chairman of the Met's board, announced that $4.8 million had been raised that evening, topping last year's total by a million dollars. James Levine said a few words, announcing that the first Lucia he had ever heard, Roberta Peters, was among the evening's guests. Gelb proclaimed that Dessay's performance "will go down in the history of the Met as one of its greatest." Peggy Siegal, the celebrity publicist at whose behest the likes of Fonda and Schwimmer had shown up, was feverishly executing changes to the seating plan even as guests were starting their entrées.

Eventually, Gelb sat down at the corner of a long trestle table, a barely touched plate before him, a succession of laudatory guests at his ear. He joked about Dessay's stumble in the first act. "I went backstage in the intermission and she was quite upset, and I told her she should do it every night, because it was even more dramatic," he said. "She got an extra ovation for it." Arthur Gelb was making suggestions for coverage of the event by his former employer, urging a *Times* photographer to get a picture of Dessay and Peters together. Andrew Rosenthal, the *Times*' editorial-page editor, was recalling Peter Gelb's tour of Russia with Horowitz, which he'd covered for the Associated Press. Gelb, he said, had arranged for Horowitz to visit the house of Aleksandr Scriabin, the celebrated pianist and composer, who died in 1915. When Horowitz and his accompanying press corps arrived, there was a piano, finely tuned, upon which Horowitz suddenly took it upon himself to play. "It was all perfectly arranged, and completely spontaneous," Rosenthal said with a laugh, while a smiling Gelb turned to accept the congratulations of another Met supporter. ♦

PROFILES

STEALING LIFE

The crusader behind "The Wire."

BY MARGARET TALBOT

On a muggy August afternoon in Baltimore, trash scuttled down Guilford Avenue, the breeze smelling like rain and asphalt. It was the last week of shooting for the fifth and final season of the HBO drama "The Wire," and the crew was filming a scene in front of a boarded-up elementary school. Cast members had been joined by forty or so day players—mostly kids from the neighborhood. Earlier, the episode's director, Clark Johnson, had been giving some of the kids the chance to say "Cut!," and they'd bellowed it like drunks at a surprise party. Now, when Johnson yelled "Cut," the kids swarmed around a video monitor to look at themselves in the last shot, pointing and laughing. "He just said it was good," one kid complained. "Why we gotta do it again?" Johnson, who was wearing what he called his "lucky cowboy hat," stepped away to talk to one of the professional actors. Another man—a bald white guy, unprepossessing in jeans and a T-shirt—remained by the monitor, and he answered the kids: "Hey. He's the *director*. You don't believe him? He kinda, sorta knows what he's doin'." The bald guy was David Simon, the show's creator: a former Baltimore *Sun* reporter who figured that he'd spend his life at a newspaper, a print journalist who has forged an improbable career in television without ever leaving Baltimore. The kids listened politely to Simon and ran back to their places.

Each season of "The Wire" has focussed, with sociological precision, on a different facet of Baltimore. The previous season featured a story line about the city's anarchic schools, told partly through the character of Roland (Prez) Pryzbylewski, a young cop turned schoolteacher. Simon recalled, "On the first day, the kids were all cutting up and yelling. It was like the first day of school. You know how they kicked the shit out of Pryzbylewski emotionally on the show? The kids were doing the same to the assistant directors. One poor A.D. was, like, 'Please! This is too fuckin' meta.' By the end of the year, we had a good crew of young actors, but in the beginning it was, as we say in Baltimore, like herding pigeons." While Simon was telling this story, Jermaine Crawford, a fourteen-year-old who joined the cast last season, came over to hug him. The scene being filmed would mark the final appearance of Crawford, whose character, Dukie, comes from a family in which all the adults are addicted to drugs or alcohol.

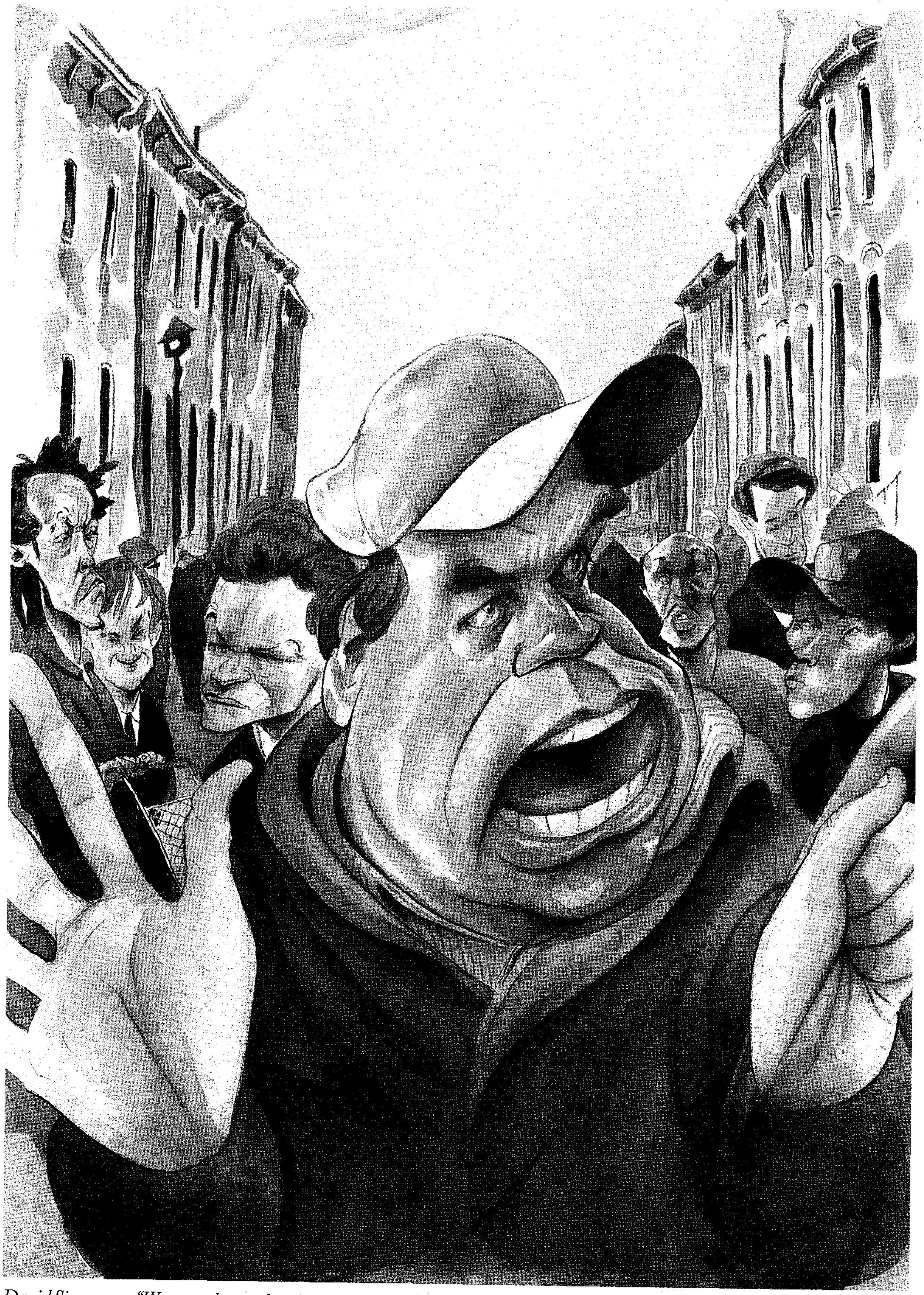
Much of the new season, which will begin airing in January, will take place at a downsizing newspaper called the Baltimore *Sun*. Johnson, back at the monitor, began teasing Simon for giving so many of his old *Sun* colleagues small parts on the show. Among the dozens of people who have recurrent parts or cameos are Simon's former editor, Rebecca Corbett, now an editor at the *Times;* the former *Sun* political reporter Bill Zorzi, now a writer for "The Wire"; Steve Luxenberg, the editor who first hired Simon as a reporter at the *Sun;* and Simon's wife, Laura Lippman, a crime novelist who used to be a *Sun* reporter.

"It was like a frat house the other day, with all your newspaper pals around here," Johnson told Simon. "What, you think somebody in Iowa's gonna be watching and go, 'Look, honey, it's Bill Zorzi!'?" Warming to his riff, he added, "You ever try playing off these people who've never acted before? Somebody yells 'Action,' and they stand here like this"—he made a blank fish face.

Johnson is an actor as well as a director. He played a detective on "Homicide," the NBC cop series based on Simon's 1991 book by the same name, about murder in Baltimore, and in the new season of "The Wire" he plays Gus Haynes, a city editor who tries to hold the line against dwindling coverage, buyouts, and pseudo-news. In the season opener, Haynes provides a bitingly funny introduction to newsroom culture. He complains about a photographer who invariably gooses the poignancy of fire scenes by positioning a charred doll somewhere amid the debris. ("I can see that cheatin' motherfucker now, with his fucking harem of dolls, pouring lighter fluid on each one," Haynes fumes.) And he patiently explains to a junior reporter one of those house rules which arbiters of newspaper style cling to with fierce persnicketiness: a building can be "evacuated," he instructs, but you cannot evacuate people. "To evacuate a person is to give that person an enema," one of the old-timers chimes in. "At the Baltimore *Sun*, God still resides in the details."

The *Sun* allowed its name to be used on "The Wire," but stipulated that no current employees could appear in it; the newspaper's offices have been re-created on the show's hulking soundstage outside the city. This arrangement suited Simon fine—he bitterly accepted a buyout offer from the paper in 1995, feeling that it was squandering talent under new management. "The Wire," Simon often says, is a show about how contemporary American society—and, particularly, "raw, unencumbered capitalism"—devalues human beings. He told me, "Every single moment on the planet, from here on out, human beings are worth less. We are in a post-industrial age. We don't need as many of us as we once did. So, if the first season was about devaluing the cops who knew their beats and the corner boys slinging drugs, then the second was about devaluing the longshoremen and their labor, the third about people who wanted to make changes in the city, and the fourth

STEVE BRODNER



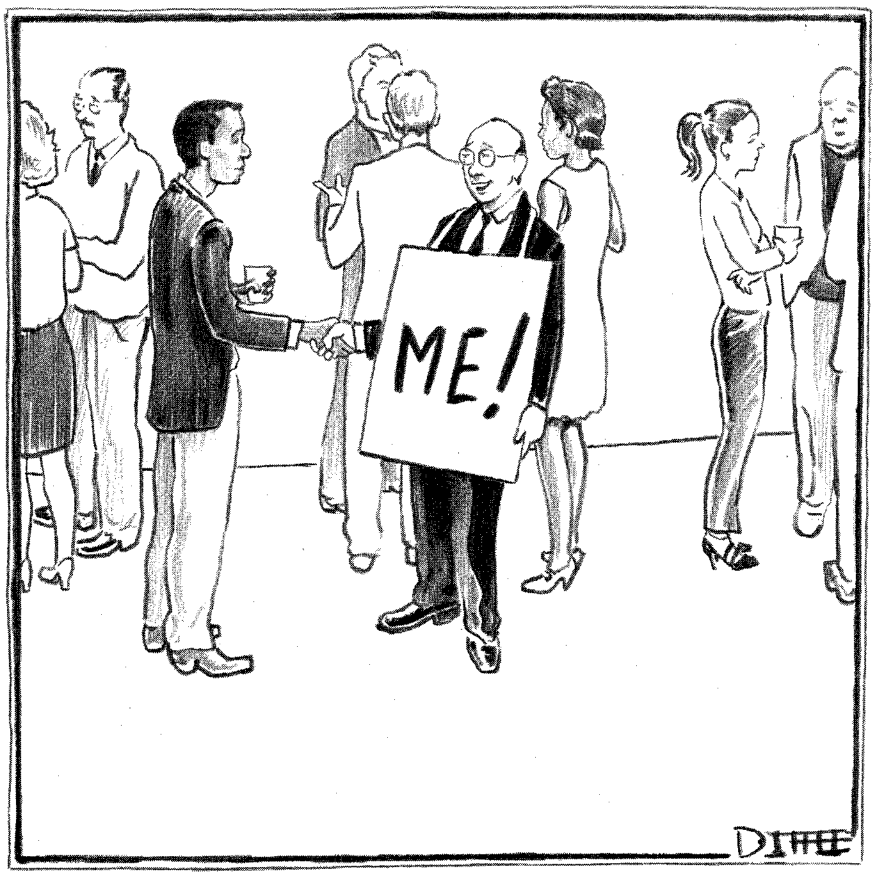
David Simon says, "We were always planning to move further and further out, to build a whole city."

was about kids who were being prepared, badly, for an economy that no longer really needs them. And the fifth? It's about the people who are supposed to be monitoring all this and sounding the alarm—the journalists. The newsroom I worked in had four hundred and fifty people. Now it's got three hundred. Management says, 'We have to do more with less.' That's the bullshit of bean counters who care only about the bottom line. You do *less* with less."

Some of the dialogue from the fifth season is taken word for word from the *Sun's* newsroom. Simon recalled, "There was this writer, Carl, who every day would eat the same thing for lunch: cottage cheese. One day, somebody walked by and saw him staring down into his cottage cheese, poking it with a spoon and saying to himself, 'Fuck, fuck, fuckity fuck.' That's in there."

Finely tuned as Simon's ear is for the newsroom, it is perhaps even better calibrated for the street corner and the precinct, having been sharpened by thirteen years of daily crime reporting. Viewers of "The Wire" must master a whole argot, though it can take a while, because the words are never defined, just as they wouldn't be by real people tossing them around. To have "suction" is to have pull with your higher-ups on the police force or in City Hall; a "redball" is a high-profile case with political consequences; to "re-up" is to get more drugs to sell. Drugs are branded with names taken from the latest news cycle: Pandemic, W.M.D., Greenhouse Gas. "The game" is the drug trade, although it emerges during the course of the show as a metaphor for the web of constraints that political and economic institutions impose on the people trapped within them. And, in one memorable neologism, a penis is referred to as a "Charles Dickens."

Because Simon and his primary writing partner, Ed Burns—a former Baltimore homicide detective who was once one of Simon's sources—are both middle-aged white men, people tend to assume that the dialogue spoken by the drug dealers and ghetto kids is ad-libbed by the black actors on the show. In fact, one of the show's writers was always present on the set, keeping the actors on script. A single dropped word was noted and corrected. Gbenga Akinnagbe, the actor who plays a drug dealer's henchman named Chris Partlow, said, "This is David's domain. He gets the streets of Baltimore better than we do." The novelist Dennis Lehane ("Mystic River"), whom Simon hired to write several scripts, agrees: "When you hear the really authentic street poetry in the dialogue, that's David, or Ed Burns. Anything that's literally 2006 or 2007 African-American ghetto dialogue—that's them. They are so much further ahead of the curve on that."



"I'm in advertising."

The show's departure from Hollywood formulas may be nowhere more palpable than in its routine use of nonactors to fill the minor roles. No other television drama, it seems safe to say, features an actor whom one of the show's lead writers helped put in prison with a thirty-four-year sentence. That is Melvin Williams, a Baltimore drug kingpin whom Ed Burns nabbed in a wiretap investigation in 1984; Simon reported on the case for the *Sun*. Williams plays the part of the Deacon, a community leader both savvy and wise. The former Baltimore mayor Kurt Schmoke, an advocate of drug decriminalization, has a small role as the city's health commissioner; the character works with a police commander who creates an experimental zone, which the street kids call Hamsterdam, where drug users won't be arrested. The former Republican governor of Maryland Robert Ehrlich shows up as a state trooper on the governor's detail in a scene where the Democratic mayor of Baltimore comes to Annapolis to ask for a bailout. People whom Simon reported on appear in cameos as city clerks, drug counsellors, corner boys, hired muscle. "These jokes don't impair anyone else's viewing," Simon explained. "But when Kurt Schmoke advocates for drug decriminalization as the city health commissioner, there's an extra kick for the locals. But here's the other thing: these are faces you don't see on television, the faces and voices of the real city."

Simon is an authenticity freak. He said, "I'm the kind of person who, when I'm writing, cares above all about whether the people I'm writing about will recognize themselves. I'm not thinking about the general reader. My greatest fear is that the people in the world I'm writing about will read it and say, 'Nah, there's nothing there.' "

Near twilight, Simon headed over to the location for the next scene: a parking lot under the highway that is directly across from the Baltimore *Sun* building. There the crew had set up a small, pretend encampment for homeless people. Cars rattled along the highway above, like marbles in a chute. The parking lot reeked, authentically, of urine.

Filming on city streets in marginal neighborhoods carries its peculiar risks and rewards. On one occasion, a car involved in a high-speed chase smashed into one of the actors' cars, and everybody had to dive out of the way. Another time, a man got shot yards away, staggered onto the set trailing blood, and was treated by the show's medic. Once, a man pressed a package of heroin into the hands of Andre Royo, the actor who plays the sympathetic junkie and police informant Bubbles, saying, "Man, you need a fix more than I do." Royo refers to that moment as his "street Oscar."

That night, the streets were a little quieter, but there was still the circus-comes-to-town bustle of a location shoot. The blue lights of an ambulance and a police car, which were featured in the homeless-people scene, pulsed in the darkness. Simon stood in the middle of it all, and crew members ran up to him with the smallest of questions: Do you like the way they've laid out the sleeping bags? What about the way the ambo and the squad car are positioned?

Gone are the days when Simon, who was a writer on "Homicide" but didn't run the show, couldn't get Johnson to say something he didn't think his character would say. Back then, Simon lacked suction. As Johnson waited for the lighting crew to finish setting up, he and Simon reminisced about how Johnson had repeated one "Homicide" speech over and over, purposely dropping a line that Simon had written. Simon recalled the episode: "That was 'Scene of the Crime.' Episode 421. Possibly 422." Now Simon is the court of last resort. The actor Tom McCarthy, who plays a reporter, came over to ask a question about the upcoming scene. McCarthy pointed out that his character was supposed to be coming back from a City Council meeting that had run late into the night. Would he really put a quarter in the parking meter at that hour, as the script indicated? "Hell, yeah," Simon said cheerfully, inviting McCarthy to take a closer look at one of the nearby meters—they were in effect twenty-four hours a day.

"You're right," McCarthy said. "You're right." With a mixture of admiration and irritation, he added, "Gee, it's great to have you on the set!"

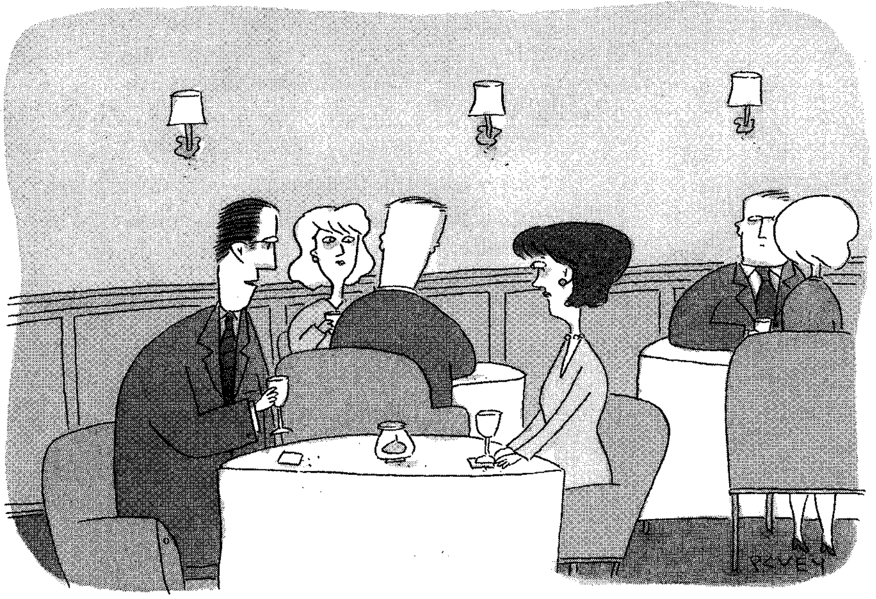
"The Wire" débuted in June, 2002, looking more or less like a cop show. But the differences were important. It spent as much time with the lawbreakers as it did with the law enforcers. And you didn't see the suspects through the cops' eyes only—you saw them through their own as well. The drug trade emerged as its own intricate bureaucracy, a hierarchy that subtly mirrored that of the police department. Moreover, "The Wire" did not rely on the jumpy handheld-camera shots and the blurry "swish pans" that a lot of network cop shows had adopted. The camera remained locked, for minutes at a time, on people talking. And the story unfolded at a slower pace, too, which meant that many of the scenes elaborated on the characters and the power structures they moved within, rather than lay the pipe of plot.

Simon delivered the pilot to HBO in November, 2001. Soon after, he met the novelist George Pelecanos at the funeral of a mutual friend. Pelecanos, like Simon, grew up in the Washington suburb of Silver Spring, Maryland; attended the University of Maryland, in College Park; and was deeply interested in the fate of the American city and, in particular, of the black urban poor. After the funeral, he gave Simon a ride. As Pelecanos recalls it, Simon told him that "The Wire" would be "a novel for television. Not in a 'Rich Man, Poor Man' sense. Each episode would be like a chapter in a book. You could digress, in the way a novel does. And it would be about the social aspects of crime." Pelecanos, who wrote seven episodes for the show, said, "That struck home, because if it's not about something more than the mystery, the thriller part, I'm not going to do it. Life's too short."

The show's title referred to the wiretap that a unit of the Baltimore police force was using to keep a local drug organization under surveillance. Ultimately, the term suggested more—the way that the show allowed viewers to eavesdrop on various recondite power plays, and the way that poverty, politics, and policing were interconnected in a struggling post-industrial city. In Simon's view, "The Wire" was never "a cop show. We were always planning to move further and further out, to build a whole city."

Simon makes it clear that the show's ambitions were grand. " 'The Wire' is dissent," he says. "It is perhaps the only storytelling on television that overtly suggests that our political and economic and social constructs are no longer viable, that our leadership has failed us relentlessly, and that no, we are not going to be all right." He also likes to say that "The Wire" is a story about the "decline of the American empire." Simon's belief in the show is a formidable thing, and it leads him into some ostentatious comparisons that he sometimes laughs at himself for and sometimes does not. Recently, he spoke at Loyola College, in Baltimore; he described the show in lofty terms that left many of the students in the audience puzzled—at least, those who had come hoping to hear how they might get a job in Hollywood. In creating "The Wire," Simon said, he and his colleagues had "ripped off the Greeks: Sophocles, Aeschylus, Euripides. Not funny boy—not Aristophanes. We've basically taken the idea of Greek tragedy and applied it to the modern city-state." He went on, "What we were trying to do was take the notion of Greek tragedy, of fated and doomed people, and instead of these Olympian gods, indifferent, venal, selfish, hurling lightning bolts and hitting people in the ass for no reason—instead of those guys whipping it on Oedipus or Achilles, it's the postmodern institutions . . . those are the indifferent gods."

When Simon pitched "The Wire" to Carolyn Strauss, now the president of HBO Entertainment, he did not mention Greek tragedy or the decline of the American empire. With only one executive-producing credit—for the HBO miniseries "The Corner," based



"You look even better in person than you did on the dressing-room surveillance camera."

on a 1997 book he co-wrote with Ed Burns, about the Baltimore drug world—he knew better. Instead, he argued that HBO might understandably be reluctant to do a cop show—cop shows, like hospital shows, were TV, not HBO—but that was, in fact, precisely why the network should do it. Now that HBO had created dramas about subjects the networks avoided (the Mafia, prisons), it was time to expose what the networks did as fraudulent. In what Simon calls a "begging-ass memo" to Strauss, he wrote:

> It is a significant victory for HBO to counter program alternative, inaccessible worlds against standard network fare. But it would, I will argue, be a more profound victory for HBO to take the essence of network fare and smartly turn it on its head, so that no one who sees HBO's take on the culture of crime and crime fighting can watch anything like "C.S.I." or "N.Y.P.D. Blue" or "Law & Order" again without knowing that every punch was pulled on those shows. For HBO to step toe-to-toe with NBC or ABC and create a cop show that seizes the highest qualitative ground through realism, good writing, and a more brutal assessment of police, police work, and the drug culture—this may not be the beginning of the end for network dramas as the industry standard, but it is certainly the end of the beginning for HBO.

For a begging-ass memo, it was supremely confident in tone. Strauss got used to such displays, and to the impassioned e-mails that Simon dashed off. "He's quick with the incendiary memo," Strauss said. "I think he puts as much into those written pleas as he does into writing his characters."

It took HBO more than a year to green-light the show. The pilot script, written by Simon and Burns, did not sufficiently impress Strauss and Chris Albrecht, then the chairman of HBO; Simon had to write two more episodes. Once the show finally entered production, there were skirmishes that helped pin down Simon's vision: HBO wanted to cut an early sequence in which Omar—a stickup artist—steals money from drug dealers who hadn't been introduced to viewers and who wouldn't appear again. But Simon argued, successfully, that the scene had to stay in, because over time Omar's importance would become clear, and because the show would lose its insider feel if it explained too much.

Rafael Alvarez, a former *Sun* reporter whom Simon hired to write for the show, said, "You know how, in a Russian novel, the reader does the work for the first hundred pages, and then it turns and you're lost in it? With 'The Wire,' it might be Episode 6 before it turns and you're in." The creators of "The Wire" would never say that their work is as good as that of Tolstoy or Dickens, but they can't quite resist the comparison, either.

"The Wire" has never won an Emmy—in fact, it has been nominated only once, for Pelecanos's script about the murder of Stringer Bell, the drug boss who imagined himself as a legitimate businessman. Its audience is modest. Last season, about 4.4 million people a week watched "The Wire." "The Sopranos," by contrast, had thirteen million viewers a week last season, and "Big Love," considered a marginal hit, had six. On any other network, "The Wire" would not have been renewed after the first season, and even on HBO its continuation was far from certain. As Simon sees it, there was a "kind of fever" at HBO for a while after " 'The Sopranos' and 'Sex and the City' generated so much heat and so much money, and magnified expectations of what a high-end cable outlet can do. Everybody was hungrily looking for the next one. But those shows were beautiful mutants." In the meantime, "if you weren't getting those numbers, it was, like, This is good and we like it, and critics like it, so we could order up another season, but, you know, we could also take this thirty or forty million and go develop three or four more pilots, one of which might become a 'Sopranos' or 'Sex and the City.'" Simon felt that "The Wire" was particularly vulnerable after its third season. But Albrecht—who has since left HBO (following an arrest in Las Vegas for assaulting his girlfriend)—liked the media focus of the projected fifth season. And Strauss, Simon said, was "crazy about the kids" in the fourth season: "She said, 'We can't cancel this—this is what we do well.' "

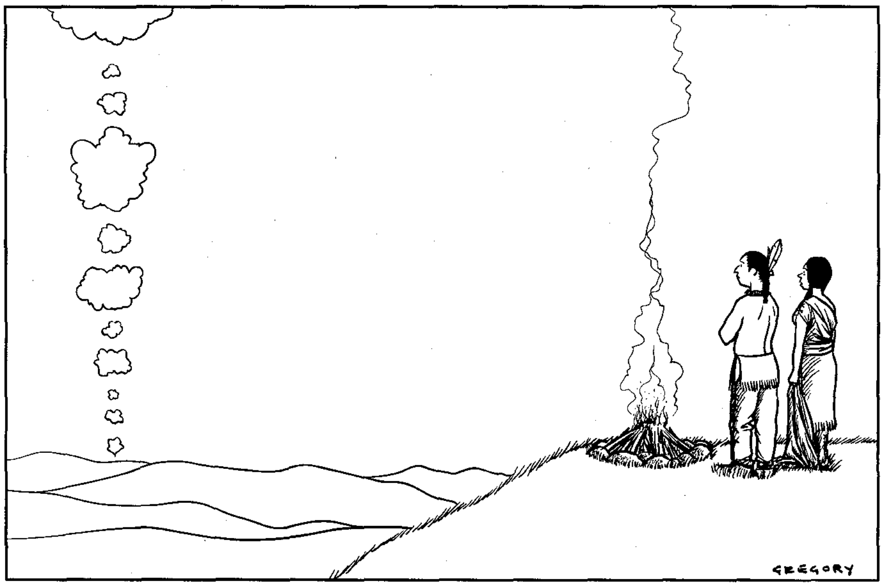
Despite having what Simon jokes is an "audience of seventeen on Sunday night," "The Wire" has been a hit with two groups in particular: people who identify with the inner-city characters, and critics. "The Wire" is the first HBO drama to be syndicated to BET. Bootleg copies of the DVDs circulate widely in the mostly black and poor neighborhoods of West Baltimore. One day during the recent season, Simon got a call from Felicia (Snoop) Pearson, who plays a butch little killer with a Baltimore street accent so thick that some viewers might be tempted to turn on closed captioning for her dialogue. (Pearson's role on "The Wire" is her first acting job; she spent most of her adolescence in a Maryland state prison, serving time for second-degree murder, and has since been trying to turn her life around.) Pearson told Simon that she had just collared a guy who was trying to sell her a bootleg DVD of "The Wire," and wanted to know what to do with him. A bemused Simon told her to set him loose: "What are you gonna do, Snoop, hold him for the HBO authorities?" The HBO message boards are full of testimonials that suggest an affinity between "Wire" fans and "Wire" characters. "My favorite character is Michael because his character and me are the same I was raised in the streetz and had to take care of me and my people thats why alot of people call me streetz and it's tatted on my hand"; "I like ma nigga Bodie sad 2 see him go he waz a true ridah!"

Critics, meanwhile, have compared the show to a great Victorian novel. The Chicago *Tribune*, *Salon*, and the San Francisco *Chronicle* have called it the best show on television. Jacob Weisberg, writing in *Slate*, went even further, declaring that "The Wire" was the best American television series that had ever been broadcast: "No other program has ever done anything remotely like what this one does, namely to portray the social, political, and economic life of an American city with the scope, observational precision, and moral vision of great literature." Sometimes the fan base of "The Wire" seems like the demographics of many American cities—mainly the urban poor and the affluent élite, with the middle class hollowed out.

A favorite phrase of David Simon's is "You can't make this shit up." In the opening sequence of the very first episode of "The Wire," Jimmy McNulty—the half mensch, half jerk of a Baltimore cop, played by the British actor Dominic West—is sitting on a stoop across from a crime scene. McNulty is talking to the compatriot of a dead guy called Snot Boogie, and can't resist a little philosophizing on the subject of his name: "This kid, whose mama went to the trouble to christen him Omar Isaiah Betts—you know, he forgets his jacket, so his nose starts runnin' and some asshole, instead of giving him a Kleenex, he calls him Snot. So he's Snot forever. It doesn't seem fair." Snot Boogie liked to shoot craps with his pals in the neighborhood, it seems, but, every time he did, he'd steal the pot before the end of the game. So why, McNulty wants to know, did they still let him play? "Got to," his interlocutor answers. "This is America, man." It was a perfectly crafted setup for Simon's themes: how inner-city life could be replete with both casual cruelty and unexpected comedy; how the police and the policed could, at moments, share the same jaundiced view of the world; how some dollar-store, off-brand version of American capitalism could trickle down, with melancholy effect, into the most forsaken corners of American society. But, as it happened, the Snot Boogie story was real—Simon had heard it, down to the line about America, from a police detective, and it appears in "Homicide: A Year on the Killing Streets." Simon's gift is in recognizing an anecdote like that for the found parable that it is—"stealing life," as he once described it to me—and knowing which parts to steal.

Of course, in producing "The Wire," Simon and his colleagues did make a lot of shit up. And yet nearly every scene is grounded in documentary truth. This became clear at the writers' meetings, which were equal parts urban-studies seminar, reporters' bull session, and Hollywood story conference. The writers' office is in a former bank in an old out-of-the-way waterfront district of Baltimore called Canton. Simon, Ed Burns, Bill Zorzi, and a young writer named Chris Collins sat around a table. Simon had a laptop open in front of him. In the middle of the table was a basket full of dried cranberries, Fig Newtons, and jelly beans. On the wall was a long sheet of butcher paper, divided into a grid: the name of each member of the show's ensemble was written in marker on the side; the episodes, identified by number, were notated along the top. Above the butcher paper were head shots of all the major actors on "The Wire." As the writers decided what would happen to each character in a given episode, Collins would write a brief description of that plot point, or "beat," on a colored index card and pushpin it to the appropriate box on the grid. But a lot of the discussion on the days I was at the writers' office had to do with the larger political themes of the show.

One morning in February, Simon—his hands laced behind his head, elbows jutting out—talked about the character of Tommy Carcetti, a venal pol with an idealistic streak, who by Season Five has been elected mayor of Baltimore. Carcetti faces any number of challenges, from bad crime statistics and floundering schools to the fundamental fact that—as he put it during his run for mayor—"tomorrow morning, I still



"No one can lay on a guilt trip like my mother."

wake up white in a city that ain't." (Carcetti is deftly played by the Irish actor Aidan Gillen.) That morning, Simon and his colleagues were analyzing how Carcetti's ambitions to become the governor of Maryland are molding his agenda in the mayor's office. Simon noted that Carcetti had promoted education reform in Season Four. "He's gotta show that test scores have gone up," he said.

"For the first and second grade," Burns said sarcastically.

"Right," Simon said. "It's always just the first and second grade." Simon was wearing jeans and a T-shirt, his standard outfit. (His lone sartorial affectation is a black porkpie hat of the type favored by jazz musicians in the nineteen-fifties.) He looked as if he could easily play one of the cops or a longshoreman. Every once in a while, he got up, thrust his hands deep in his pockets, and paced in front of the window, with its distant view of downtown Baltimore. Burns is silver-haired and pink-cheeked, and, in his homey cardigan, might suggest Mr. Rogers, if Mr. Rogers were a brainy, cynical, and profane former homicide detective.

Burns said, "Carcetti is, like, 'I don't want to be the education mayor—the numbers aren't good.' His advisers go down the list: environmental mayor, this, that, and the other thing. He tries on a few roles, and they just don't have the juice. But then he decides on the homelessness issue—this is great stuff. And he runs with it." Eventually, Burns suggested, Carcetti would learn a little about the complicated reality of homelessness, "but he's not interested in the reality. He wants a silver bullet." Maybe, Burns went on, Carcetti could acquire some FEMA trailers to shelter the homeless of Baltimore, and talk grandiloquently about how the homeless situation is a disaster on the scale of Hurricane Katrina. Zorzi, the former political reporter, rejected this as implausible: how would the Democratic mayor of Baltimore get trailers from the Bush Administration?

This final season of the show, Simon told me, will be about "perception versus reality"—in particular, what kind of reality newspapers can capture and what they can't. Newspapers across the country are shrinking, laying off beat reporters who understood their turf. More important, Simon believes, newspapers are fundamentally not equipped to convey certain kinds of complex truths. Instead, they focus on scandals—stories that have a clean moral. "It's like, Find the eight-hundred-dollar toilet seat, find the contractor who's double-billing," Simon said at one point. "That's their bread and butter. Systemic societal failure that has multiple problems—newspapers are not designed to understand it."

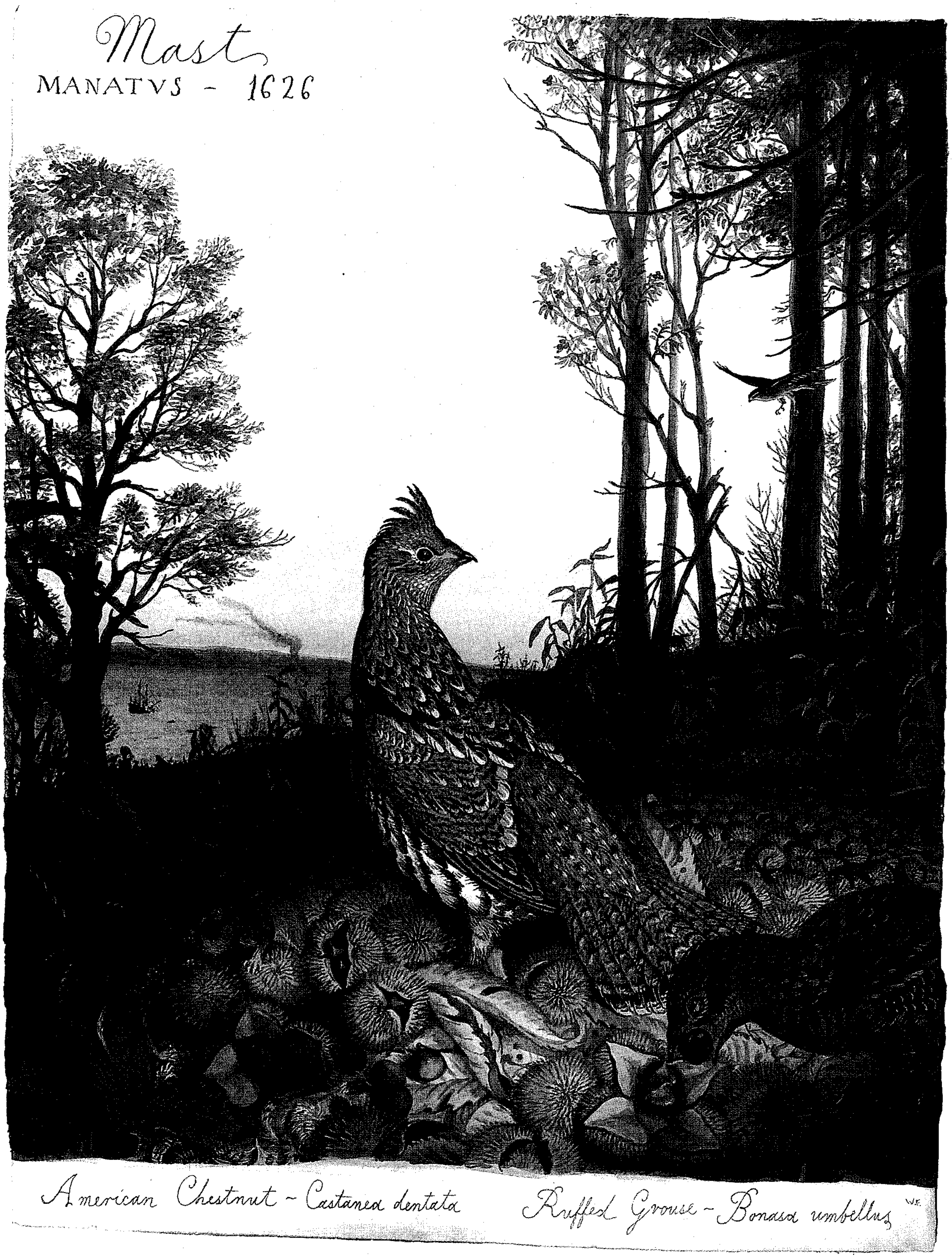
If Simon's characters were to deliver the kind of doomy social criticism that Simon does, "The Wire" would, as he likes to say, "lay there like a bagel." Fortunately, his characters bristle with humor, quirks, private sorrows; his drug dealers express intricate opinions about Baltimore radio stations, chicken nuggets, and chess. One reason for this is that the writers knew people like them. Burns knew plenty of drug dealers as a homicide detective and plenty of inner-city teen-agers when, like Detective Pryzbylewski, he left the force and became a teacher in the Baltimore city schools. Zorzi knew plenty of city and state politicians when he was a tough, cranky *Sun* reporter who would never eat so much as a carrot stick from a buffet paid for by a candidate. As a crime reporter for the *Sun*, Simon knew plenty of junkies, snitches, cops, and people just trying to keep their heads down and get by in violent neighborhoods. Simon can be scathing, even righteous, about other television shows that presume to depict urban America without the benefit of direct knowledge. As he told the audience at Loyola, "So much of what comes out of Hollywood is horseshit. Because these people live in West L.A., they don't even go to East L.A. The only time they go downtown is to get their license renewed. And what they increasingly know about the world is what they see on other TV shows about cops or crime or poverty. The American entertainment industry gets poverty so relentlessly wrong. . . . Poor people are either the salt of the earth, and they're there to exalt us with their homespun wisdom and their sheer grit and determination to rise up, or they are people to be beaten up in an interrogation room by Sipowicz. . . . How is it that there's nobody actually on a human scale from the other America? The reason is they've never met anybody from the other America. I mean, they could ask their gardener what it's like."

The writers began to see Season Five as a tragicomic collision between homeless people, newspaper reporters, politicians, and the cops we've come to know. Carcetti, they decided, would suffer some significant collateral damage. "I actually feel bad for him," Simon said, laughing. "He's doing his job here, which is basically: be on the right side of some issue and exalt your achievement."

Over the next several days, the writers poked holes in each other's ideas and, like Greek gods, mapped out the fates of the characters. Most of the trajectories were grim, but one troubled character, they decided, would pull himself together and enjoy what George Pelecanos calls one of the show's "inglorious redemptions—not Rocky knocking the Russian out in the ninth round but somebody getting through to the other side." Simon often says that "The Wire" refuses to indulge in the "life-affirming" messages that are woven into the fabric of network TV. Still, he seemed glad to incorporate this small victory into an otherwise rigorously unsentimental picture. "We don't have a lot of victories," Simon told his colleagues. "As cynically as the rest of this stuff is ending, it will validate the one place we put any of our sincerity, which is individual action." It's hard to classify Simon politically, but anytime you start thinking of him as some sort of bleeding-heart socialist you're brought up short by his unremitting skepticism about institutions.

During the writers' meetings, Burns and Simon often finished each other's sentences. They met in 1985, when Simon was covering the criminal career of Melvin Williams, and Burns was the lead detective investigating him. Burns had an encyclopedic knowledge of the Baltimore drug trade, a conviction that he was right about most things, and an autodidact's intellectualism. When Simon first arranged to meet Burns, at a public library, he discovered him with a stack of books, including John Fowles's "The Magus" and a volume by Hannah Arendt. "Once I found him, I

WALTON FORD/COURTESY OF PAUL KASMIN GALLERY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W.F.

didn't let go," Simon told me. After they finished writing Season Five of "The Wire," they teamed up again on Simon's next project for HBO: a miniseries called "Generation Kill," based on the 2004 book, by Evan Wright, about a Marine platoon in Iraq. Simon recalled, "Ed used to drive the other cops crazy because he knew better at every point how to do an investigation, and then when he got the cases to court he would tell the prosecutors how to present them. He pissed them off. And when he was in the school system the assistant principals learned to hate him." In the early days of "The Wire," Simon said, he and Burns used to have "hellacious" arguments—he compared them to scenes from "a toxic marriage." He continued, "I finally said to him, 'I'm not going to abdicate. I always have to trust my own ideas in the end. I'll pick the ones out of your sixty ideas that I think are going to work, and I'll leave the others on the table.' But there were also moments when he fought really hard for something and in the end I saw it." Burns, Simon said, "always pushes me further than I would go on my own." He is the show's policy visionary—the one who, Simon half joked, "is only working in TV till somebody realizes that they ought to give him all the money to fix our social problems."

Before shooting began in April, scene-by-scene blueprints for the first four episodes were doled out to various writers. The most prolific are Simon and Burns, along with Lehane, Pelecanos, and the novelist Richard Price. All the scripts, Pelecanos said, are minutely mapped out. "In the end, the final word is David's," he said. "I have come to where I try and write in his voice. We have an expression—'You give it up.' There were times when David and I were going at it pretty hard and I managed to get a lot of what I wanted. Other times, maybe thirty per cent of what I'd written made it into the final script. But he'd told me from the beginning, 'You're lucky when you get thirty per cent into a finished script.' On city politics in particular, I knew anything I wrote would be completely reworked by Simon and Zorzi—I had never researched that world and didn't know anything about it. And, truthfully, I fought that thread—Carcetti, all that. I didn't think anybody would want to see it, and I didn't want to write it. But, in the end, I think Simon was right. It made the show richer and gave a more balanced and panoramic view of the city. You just can't understand the streets without understanding politics."

WHEELING MOTEL

The vast waters flow past its back yard.
You can purchase a six-pack in bars!
Tammy Wynette's on the marquee

a block down. It's twenty-five years ago:
you went to death, I to life, and
which was luckier God only knows.

There's this line in an unpublished poem of yours.
The river is like that,
a blind familiar.

The wind will die down when I say so;
the leaden and lessening light on
the current.

Then the moon will rise
like the word reconciliation,
like Walt Whitman examining the tear on a dead face.

—*Franz Wright*

David Simon was born in 1960, and brought up in a comfortable, book-filled house in Silver Spring. His father, Bernard Simon, was the public-relations director and the chief speechwriter for B'nai B'rith, and his mother, Dorothy Simon, was a homemaker who went back to college in her fifties and became a counsellor for runaway teens in McLean, Virginia. She attended the University of Maryland at the same time David did and graduated summa cum laude, whereas Simon, who was consumed by his work editing the college newspaper, was a C student. ("B-minus, maybe, but that would be generous," Simon said.) Simon's brother Gary, who is fourteen years older than David, is now the head of the infectious-diseases program at George Washington University Medical Center. His sister Linda, who was ten years older, was an abstract painter; she died of breast cancer in 1990. Laura Lippman, Simon's wife, says that her mother-in-law once told her that David was her most "interesting" child; one day, she came home and found him curled up in the dryer, laughing to himself.

At the dinner table, Gary Simon recalls, David was often privy to "political discussion at a level of exposure that wouldn't be typical for a six-year-old kid." The Simons were committed New Deal Democrats—Bernard Simon was a fervent supporter of Hubert Humphrey. Once, when the family arrived late for a Kol Nidre service and found the synagogue doors closed to stragglers, Bernard became so angry that he decided to found his own Saturday-morning service; it took place in another synagogue's basement. "There were always rabbis around," Gary says. "And a lot of discussion. David was an active participant in that as a kid." The family kept kosher, Gary says, "till one day a neighbor gave me a piece of bacon, and that was the end of that. Neither David nor I feel religious. I would say we feel traditional."

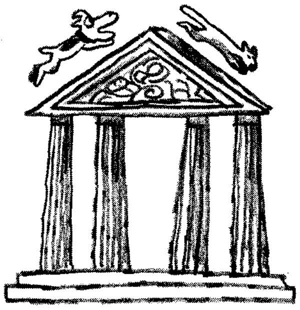
Reporting attracted Simon early on. Bernard Simon had started out as a journalist—before he went to work in public relations, he'd been the managing editor of the N.Y.U. student newspaper, and a stringer for the Hudson County *Dispatch*—and he had friends who were reporters. One was Irving Spiegel, who was known as Pat, because, as a religion reporter for the *Times*, he spent so much time in St. Patrick's Cathedral. Simon described Uncle Pat to me in an e-mail: "He could play concert piano, and composed verses of the 'Metropolitan Desk Opera,' a never-ending farce of the *Times* that he would perform at parties, goofing on co-workers and bosses. He could recite Shakespeare in Yiddish. He had a way of seizing the floor at parties and ranting comically at imagined affronts and outrages. As a young child, I thought he was typical of newspapermen in his élan and brass. I expected to meet lots of people like Uncle Pat. It was a different place and time, I guess. Between knowing Pat and my father taking me to see a revival of 'The Front Page' at Arena Stage when I was eleven or twelve, I was sold a bill of goods."

David Mills, now a television writer in Hollywood, worked with Simon on the *Diamondback,* the University of Maryland paper, and remembers that Simon produced great humor pieces. Mills said, "He had a full-blown writing personality as an undergraduate. He was always getting parking tickets, so he did these rambling, profane, angry pieces about the student ticketers, his nemeses." He continued, "Though people don't talk much about the humor in 'The Wire,' it's there. You drop somebody into an alien environment—a closed society like the homicide cops or the drug culture—and the key to working your way into that culture is to understand the jokes, which David does. It's crucial, because, if it weren't there, the work would be too depressing. It's crushing subject matter, but not necessarily to the cops—they're making jokes while they're looking at dead bodies—and not to the people shooting dope, even. They're not necessarily walking around saying, 'Woe is me.' There's a grim humor that springs out of that life."

In his senior year, Simon became the College Park stringer for the Baltimore *Sun*. He wrote so many stories that a shop steward complained he was violating the union contract; after he graduated, the *Sun* put him on staff full time. He was assigned to the police beat. Rebecca Corbett, the former *Sun* editor, told me that Simon "saw the cop beat as a whole window onto the sociology of the city, a way of examining the failings of government, a way to think about policy, especially drug policy, and a way of telling stories." She continued, "David would say that all he ever wanted to be was a reporter for the Baltimore *Sun*. It was his home. He was tremendous fun, because he was passionate. He always wrote too long; he could be pigheaded; he was a deadline pusher. And he got into all kinds of labor stuff at the paper. At one point, I told him that he could not circulate another memo until I'd seen it."

Simon wrote about how the interplay of cocaine and semi-automatic weapons jacked up the city's murder rate; he wrote about the homicide unit on Christmas—"which seemed ironical enough to my twenty-five-year-old sensibilities," he said. And he wrote an obituary of a police informant with a photographic memory and a talent for ruses, who became the basis of the character Bubbles on "The Wire." Occasionally, he published articles that strained for literary effect—such as an extended comparison of a convicted drug dealer and Shakespeare's Richard III. But even as "Homicide" and "The Corner" were published to excellent reviews, he continued to write standard newspaper fare—"F.B.I. NOW MONITORING STATE PROBE OF HAGERSTOWN PRISON RIOT," "MURDER SUSPECT, STOPPED FOR SPEEDING, WAS FREED."

After years of reporting in Baltimore's ghettos, he found himself at ease with being the only white person in a room, or the only person in the room who didn't know how to re-vial drugs, and found, too, that he could channel the voices of people in the game. "To be a decent city reporter, I had to listen to people who were different from me," Simon explained. "I had to not be uncomfortable asking stupid questions or being on the outside. I found I had a knack for walking into situations where I didn't know anything, and just waiting. A lot of reporters don't want to be the butt of jokes. But sometimes it's useful to act as if you couldn't find your ass with both hands."



Along the way, Simon grew deeply attached to his adopted city, Baltimore—or Bodymore, Murdaland, as the graffiti in the title sequence of "The Wire" has it. Rafael Alvarez, the *Sun* colleague who became a "Wire" writer, told me that when he and Simon worked together they liked to "hang out at 3 A.M. at the end of Clinton Street, drinking cheap beer, maybe whiskey. You know those scenes of McNulty and his partner drinking at the railroad tracks? That's basically what we were doing. There were old warehouses and scores of feral cats. We'd sort of stare across the harbor at Fort McHenry, talking about the city we both loved." Simon and Alvarez were both connoisseurs of the Baltimore vernacular, and some of the sayings that Alvarez learned from his father, a merchant marine, made it into the scripts. If you were crazy, you were "half goofy," and if you were drunk you were "half in the bag" or had "half a load on." ("Why half? I always wondered," Alvarez said.) If you lost your job or died, you were "finished with engines." Simon relished Alvarez's eye for Baltimore detail, and let him indulge it in his work for "The Wire." In one script that Alvarez wrote, there's a scene in the office of the union boss in which a dartboard hanging on the wall features a photograph of Robert Irsay, the owner of the Baltimore Colts, who, in 1984, took the team to Indianapolis. "Simon and I are the kind of guys who, when we see those horseshoes with the word 'Indianapolis' on them, we want to throw up," Alvarez said.

Alvarez noted of Simon, "He could have been out there in L.A. years ago, writing scripts." But Simon never considered leaving. It helped that Laura Lippman, Simon's third wife—whom he began dating in 2000 and married last year—was a Baltimore girl, whose mystery novels were set in the city, and who had no intention of leaving it. And it helped, too, that his second wife, a graphic artist to whom he's still close, and with whom he shares custody of the couple's thirteen-year-old son, Ethan, lived just outside the city. (Once, when I was visiting the tall, narrow Baltimore row house where Simon and Lippman live—Simon also owns and writes in the place next door—I noticed a menorah that Ethan had made for them, in which the candleholders were tiny handcrafted facsimiles of the books they'd published.)

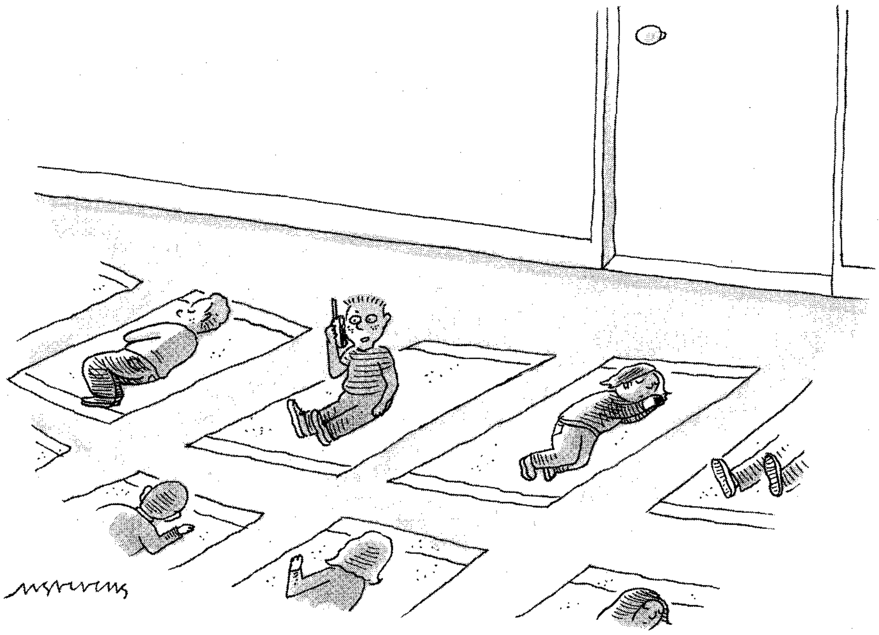
In the early nineties, the *Sun* came under new leadership, and Simon's "Front Page" fantasy sputtered out. The Times Mirror Company, which had bought the paper in 1986, brought in a new editor, John Carroll, and a new managing editor, William Marimow, both veterans of the Philadelphia *Inquirer*, and both with fine reputations as newsmen. "When the boys from Philly showed up, they arrived with a mythology that they had the keys to the kingdom and they were gonna show us how to do journalism," Simon said. "But to my great surprise—because their reps preceded them—they were tone-deaf and prize-hungry and more interested in self-aggrandizement than in building lasting quality at the paper."

Simon liked the new regime even less when it began thinning out the staff with buyouts. It was only the beginning of an era in which newspaper readerships and budgets got smaller. In 2000, the Times Mirror Company was itself bought by the Tribune Company. And when John Carroll later quit the editorship of the Los Angeles *Times*, rather than institute cutbacks, he became a hero to many newspaper reporters.

Though Simon took the *Sun's* second buyout offer, he still misses breaking news, his wife says. As he once wrote in an essay, he "had long imagined" himself "bumming cigarettes from younger reporters in exchange for back-in-the-day stories about what it was like to work with Mencken and Manchester." For a man who has been as successful as he has in a new career, his anger hasn't abated much toward the forces that, as he sees it, drove him out of journalism. The flip side of his loyalty—he is the kind of guy who will take off work to attend a funeral for the ninety-something mother of a retired rewrite man he used to work with at the *Sun*—is his tendency to hold a grudge. In April, on a Baltimore public radio show, Simon remarked that he still remembers the name of the girl who wouldn't kiss him in grade school when they were playing Spin the Bottle, and of the pasteup guy who, back in 1985, excised the last precious paragraph of one of his stories. He went on, "Anything I've ever done in life, down to cleaning up my room, has been accomplished because I was going to show people that they were fucked up and wrong and that I was the fucking center of the universe." It was a joke, but not entirely. Evidence of Simon's feuds often ends up on "The Wire." In the fourth season, Simon introduced a highly unpleasant supervisor of the major-crimes unit—someone who is more than willing to close down any investigations that might embarrass politicians, and of whom a sergeant says, "He doesn't cast off talent lightly. He heaves it away with great force." His name is Marimow.

The real William Marimow, who is now the editor of the Philadelphia *Inquirer*, says that he's baffled and dismayed by Simon's "obsession" with what went on at the *Sun:* "He is as monomaniacal as Captain Ahab pursuing the white whale." Marimow says that the *Sun* made great strides in narrative and in-depth journalism—and was acknowledged for doing so in the *Columbia Journalism Review* and other publications—during the same years that Simon "claims we were destroying it." He recalls only two conflicts with Simon: one over a raise that Simon wanted, and one over an article that Simon wrote about "metalmen"—people who strip houses of copper piping and sell it. Marimow didn't like Simon's use of the word "harvesters" to describe "people who were destroying homes. I thought it glorified them. He disagreed." Now, Marimow says, "it's this drumbeat, year after year, of rewriting history."

Carroll, for his part, said that when he became editor the *Sun* was a "fallen angel" that had enjoyed "its journalistic peak in the nineteen-twenties and thirties. . . . Among newspaper journalists elsewhere, the *Sun* was regarded as uninspired and underperforming. It clearly needed work." He said, "Were we prize-hungry? I'd be thrilled to accept a Pulitzer. Wouldn't you?" He went on, "David considers himself the ultimate police reporter, and he disdains anyone else who succeeds at it. Bill Marimow won two Pulitzers as a police reporter; David won zero. One



"I've asked you never to call me during nap time."

doesn't need a degree in psychology to understand why David is so enraged about both Bill and the Pulitzers."

Simon's television career has been less acrimonious. In 1991, the director Barry Levinson optioned Simon's book "Homicide" for a television series. Simon was happy to receive a check, and hoped that the show would lead to more sales of his book, but he didn't think it would change his life all that much. Then the show's producers suggested that Simon try writing a script. Simon called up David Mills, his old *Diamondback* colleague, who was now working as a reporter at the Washington *Post*. Neither Mills nor Simon had ever written a script. But Simon has proved remarkably good at identifying friends and associates who could make a major life transition—from journalism to screenwriting, from crime to acting, from police work to television production. Mills says of Simon, "He brought me on for a lark, and it changed my life." The two men wrote a script about a tourist whose wife is killed in front of him and their young children. Tom Fontana, one of the producers, considered it too dark, and held on to it until the second season of "Homicide," when Robin Williams agreed to guest star. The script won a Writers Guild Award. Mills recalls, "I jumped all over that. I got an agent, I moved out here to L.A. I was, like, 'David, a door has opened for us.' I got on 'N.Y.P.D. Blue' and I kept trying to tell him, 'There's money to be made out here.' But he's a newspaper guy in a way I never was." Eventually, though, Simon did immerse himself fully in television. He became a producer on "Homicide," and spent years learning from Fontana—how to write scripts, how to cast actors, how to be a useful presence on the set. It was worth it, Fontana told him: "You become a producer to protect your writing."

"Look at you—all divorced and tieless!"

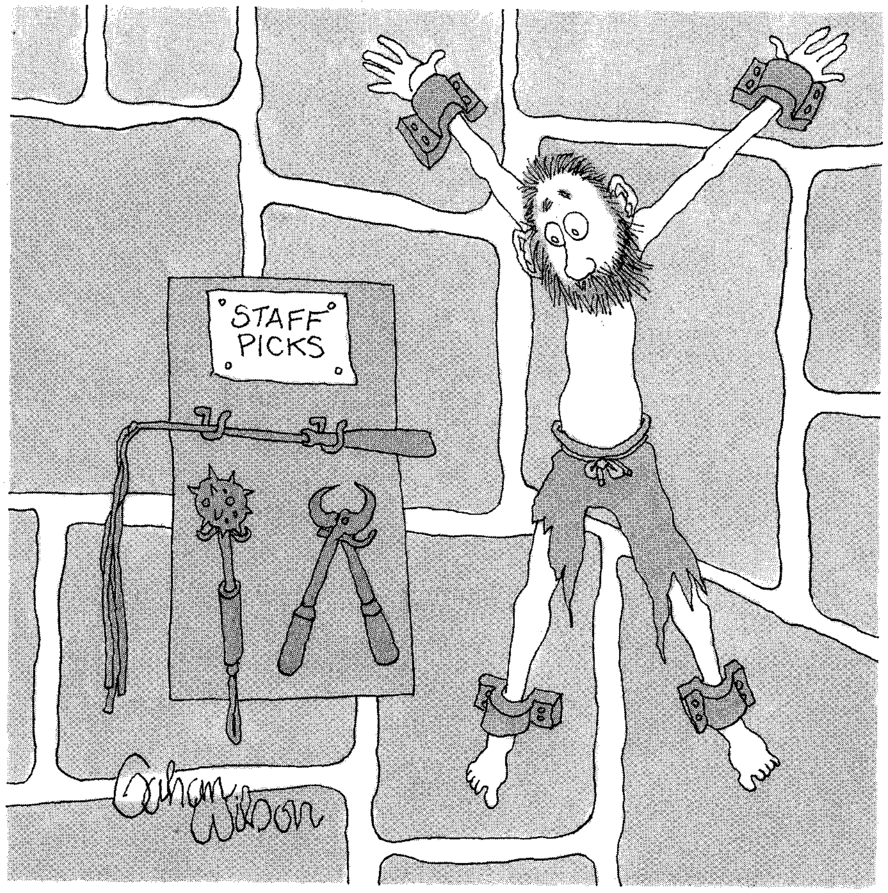
• •

Last November, Simon and his wife travelled to New Orleans. On a chilly Sunday morning, they walked up Louisa Street, in the Ninth Ward, with the Nine Times Social and Pleasure Club parade. The Nine Times is a "second-line club"—part of the New Orleans tradition of honoring people who have recently died with a high-stepping, glitzily costumed procession, accompanied by brass bands. It emerged in the post-Reconstruction period, when African-Americans couldn't get burial insurance but wanted their friends and neighbors to pass on in style. This particular club was made up of people who lived in a Ninth Ward housing project called the Desire, which had been torn down. The day's parade was a sendoff for a Mr. Hollis Magee and a Mr. Donald (Pig) Green, and it proceeded boldly across a freeway overpass to Desire Street and, ultimately, to Piety Street. Simon was visiting because the next series he hopes to do for HBO is set in New Orleans—he loves the city, and wanted to use it as a setting even before the storm, though he certainly does not know it as well as he knows Baltimore. He was doing the kind of hanging-out research that he used to do as a reporter: listening to how people talk, picking up phrases and perspectives on the world.

The series will focus on New Orleans's music community, and Simon plans to base some of the main characters on real people: a jazz trumpeter named Kermit Ruffins, who plays with a band called the Barbecue Swingers; Donald Harrison, Jr., a musician who is also the chief of an Indian tribe that performs at Mardi Gras; and Davis Rogan, a local d.j. and piano player. Rogan was at the parade—Simon had picked him up earlier at his house, whose decrepit interior had more shades of paint than I had ever seen in any dwelling. Rogan is a tall, shambling guy with unruly sandy hair and a soul patch. He seemed to know every musician in New Orleans, and perhaps two-thirds of the people at the parade. He teaches music in the New Orleans schools, and he once ran for state representative on a platform of legalizing marijuana and using the revenues to fix the city's streets—"Pot for potholes!" was his slogan.

Simon had tracked Rogan down in France, where he'd been some sort of artist-in-residence at an abbey. "I was in the Loire Valley, surrounded by very rich old people, most of whom had been dead a thousand years—Eleanor of Aquitaine, people like that," Rogan recalled. "And French people kept asking me, 'Is New Orleans dead?' 'No, you fucking idiot!'" He spoke good-humoredly over the parade musicians, who were playing "It's All Over Now." He said of the city, "It is what it is now."

We walked over washboard streets,



past boarded-up houses with desiccated spider plants hanging from the porch ceilings. A large dead gull lay in the street. Many of the houses were still spray-painted with messages indicating the number of live or dead people inside. Some had messages about animals, which Rogan found objectionable: "How'd you like it if your house was spray-painted in big black letters with something about a pit bull? Why didn't they take it all the way—spray-paint, you know, 'Rat in back!' "

Simon said he had heard that some of the housing projects hadn't been reopened yet, though they could, with some cleaning up, be viable places to live.

"Yeah, they're going for a scattered-site housing plan now," Rogan said.

"Really scattered," Simon said. "Like, from Houston to Atlanta."

It was a blue-sky day, and the nip in the air was just enough to wake up a musician who'd played a late-night gig. A woman in a black puffy jacket and ankle-strap stilettos drank Sutter Hill wine through a straw, while a white hipster girl in her twenties banged on a Little Tikes drum. Another woman stood over a man who was lying on the ground; both of them laughed as she joked, "I'm gonna whip your ass!" People were smoking cigars, taking photos with their cell phones, dancing to the music. Somebody was selling two things—Jack Daniel's and candied apples—from the back of a truck. Simon looked around quietly, taking it in, though every once in a while he hummed along to the music or asked Rogan a question. Simon wore slightly baggy jeans, one of his porkpie hats, shades, and a black fleece jacket. He wasn't being secretive about his information-gathering, but he was being low-key. As he told me later, "It was too early in the process to have politicians or community leaders, or all the people looking to get on some Hollywood tit, trying to bum-rush this thing. There's a time and a place for that down the road, if this thing gets any kind of green light, but now it's just about getting comfortable with these voices and this world, and writing a good pilot and first-season bible. If I screw that up, it ends right there."

Musicians, Simon complained, were harder to pin down for meetings than drug dealers. He decided that it was better to attend gigs and approach them between sets. That evening, we went to a club, Jin Jean's, to watch Kermit Ruffins play. Sipping a vodka-and-cranberry, Simon explained, "I'm listening now for how they use a phrase or tell a story. Like, I've asked musicians, What do you say when you hit a bad note? They said they call it a 'clam.' I was, like, Really? I called it that in my high-school jazz band thirty years ago."

Compared to "The Wire," he said, the New Orleans project will have to be "a smaller, more intimate story about musicians reconstituting their lives." Simon is planning to work with Eric Overmyer, a writer who lives part time in the city. "New Orleans is a place where even nuances have nuances," he said. "It has an incredibly ornate oral tradition."

Simon said that he was eager to explore his love of music on the new show. The singer-songwriter Steve Earle, a friend of Simon's, says, "David is a music freak." The two men met after Simon cast Earle in "The Wire," as a scruffy twelve-step drug counsellor named Walon. For "The Wire," Simon did not want music perpetually in the background; it had to come from something visible in a scene, like a boom box or a car with open windows. There were two exceptions: every season ends with a montage accompanied by a song, and the opening credits feature "Way Down in the Hole," a twisted gospel song written by Tom Waits. Simon's search for the right opening song was intense. He went through his record collection—which runs to Woody Guthrie, the Pogues, Muddy Waters, jazz, and R. & B., including New Orleans groups like the Meters—looking for something that would imply "misplaced faith in the postmodern, post-industrial gods. Obviously, given that order, there was not a lot that worked." Waits's song fit this high-flown criterion, but Simon felt that his "white man's growl" wasn't right for the first season, which was so deeply rooted in black West Baltimore. So he decided to use a cover version by the Blind Boys of Alabama. For the next season, set at the port, where many of the main characters were white union guys, he returned to the Waits original, and then he decided to change the interpretation every season, to reflect the shifting focus of the show. The fourth season, with its schools story line, featured a version by a Baltimore boys' choir. This year, it will be Steve Earle, whose bottomed-out voice suits the homeless theme.

The day after the parade, Simon took a drive around New Orleans. He said, "This show will be a way of making a visual argument that cities matter. 'The Wire' has not really done that. I certainly never said or wanted to say that Baltimore is not worth saving, or that it can't be saved. But I think some people watching the show think, Why don't they just move away?" Indeed, the City Council of Baltimore once nearly passed a resolution that proposed steps to counter the bad image of Baltimore propagated by "The Wire." In 2005, the *Sun* quoted a report by an image-consulting company that the city had hired. "Baltimore is plagued by negative press and harmful characterizations in the media, resulting in an inferiority complex," it said. "The perception of Baltimore is 'The Wire,' 'The Corner,' 'Homicide' . . . a hopeless, depressed, unemployed, crack-addicted city." And, under the headline "NO WAY TO TREAT A TOWN," a reviewer for the New York *Post* quipped, "I don't know this Simon guy, but he doesn't seem to like Baltimore very much, although he makes a very good living writing about it."

Simon discounts such criticism, but he acknowledged, "On 'The Wire,' we've been so angry about what's been mangled in public policy, and what's at stake, that we really didn't have time to celebrate what the city can be." A goal of the new series, he thinks, will be to make a case for the glories of the American city—"why we need to accept ourselves as an urban people." And, to his mind, it doesn't get any better than New Orleans. "At the Macy's parade, when they show New York, they gotta get the dancers from Broadway shows out in the streets doing a kick line," he said. "In New Orleans the musicians are already in the streets."

Not long ago, Simon pulled off a coup that only he could have. It combined his media savvy, his loyalty to the people he's written about, and his commitment to changing the way the underclass is represented. In "The Corner," Simon and Burns had written extensively about a woman named Fran Boyd, a smart, likable person who had a devastating addiction to heroin, and whose first husband eventually died of his addiction. After Simon and Burns finished reporting the book, they introduced her to a man named Donnie Andrews, who was serving time for murder. Like the character Omar in "The Wire," Andrews had robbed drug dealers at gunpoint. Eventually, he killed one.

Andrews had turned himself in to Burns, and Simon had written about him. Burns sensed that he was somebody who could support Boyd in her flickering hope of getting off heroin for good. As Burns told her, "You think you know it all? Well, I've got someone for you." After Burns gave Boyd's phone number to Andrews, the two began talking for hours on the phone every week, and Andrews, a former heroin user himself, persuaded her to change. For twenty-eight harrowing days in the Baltimore Recovery Center, she got detoxed, and, over the next twelve years, she became a drug counsellor for recovering addicts, a far better mother to her two sons, and a guardian for two nieces and a nephew, all while lobbying to get Andrews released. She and Andrews fell in love. In April, 2005, after seventeen years in federal prison in Phoenix, Arizona, Andrews was freed. The two made plans to marry in Baltimore, in August of this year.

Since Boyd and Simon first met, they had become close friends. In fact, she and both of her sons played small parts on "The Wire"; her younger son even became an assistant film editor on the show. When Simon heard about Boyd's engagement, he jumped into action.

In recent years, Simon had become an unlikely fan of the "Vows" column in the *Times*—the Sunday feature in which a couple's wedding is described in detail. Wouldn't it make a statement, he thought, if Fran and Donnie's wedding was covered by "Vows"? Usually, the couples were privileged: Ivy League graduates in Vera Wang dresses and Armani tuxes. Simon called up one of the "Vows" editors, introduced himself, and made his pitch. When the editor called back to say she liked the idea, she told him that the paper wanted to do a feature article about Boyd and Andrews as well. A few weeks later, the editor told Simon via e-mail that the "Vows" column had been cancelled. That made him mad. "Having Fran and Donnie in the 'Vows' section was inclusive and smart, an unspoken triumph for the N.Y.T. itself—a democratization," he explained to me in an e-mail. "To do a feature was far less so—in fact, it was the opposite, in a way. As if such a marriage were grist for a news feature but unsuitable to be considered among other romances."

So Simon called Bill Keller, the editor of the *Times*, and made his pitch again. Are you saying, Keller asked, that you'd rather have the "Vows" piece than a front-page feature? Yes, Simon told him, strange though it might seem. Keller said that he'd have to think about it and call him back; he was a fan of "The Wire," but this decision would have to be made on its merits. In the end, he called Simon and said that he'd read the feature and it made him want to go to Fran and Donnie's wedding. The feature ran—on the front page of the August 9th edition.

The "Vows" column ran on August 19th. It said that Boyd and Andrews were married at a catering hall in Baltimore, by the pastor of the A.M.E. church where Andrews is now head of security and does anti-gang outreach work. According to the *Times*, the bride wore a strapless, beaded wedding dress. The groom wore a black tuxedo with a pink tie. They marched down the aisle to the accompaniment of a Luther Vandross song, "Here and Now." The guests included the actors Dominic West, Sonja Sohn, and Andre Royo from "The Wire." David Simon was the best man. ♦

THE CRITICS

BOOKS

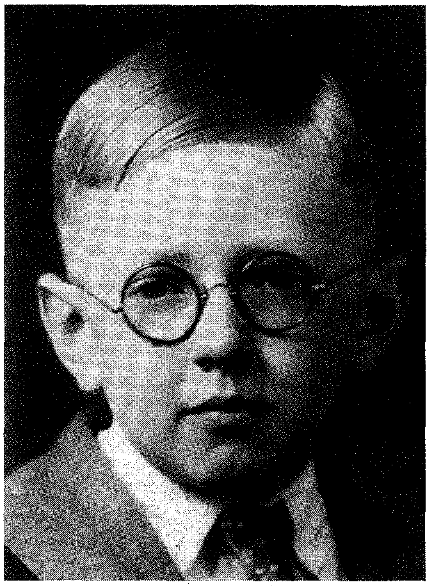
SPARKY FROM ST. PAUL

A biography of Charles Schulz.

BY JOHN UPDIKE

There is much to enjoy and admire in "Schulz and Peanuts," a biography of Charles Schulz by David Michaelis (HarperCollins; $34.95). The basic story, of how a not conspicuously gifted but very determined barber's son from St. Paul, Minnesota, rose to become the richest cartoonist of all time, warms the heart in traditional American fashion. Michaelis, whose previous biography concerned the dynasty-founding illustrator N. C. Wyeth, never met Schulz but has interviewed almost everyone still alive who brushed against the lonely, self-contained creator of "Peanuts," and has taken good advantage of the superabundant interviews that the cartoonist, jealous of his privacy though he was, gave to reporters:

> Charles Schulz's commitment to newspapers was second only to cartooning itself. He saw it as his obligation to give an interview to every editor who sent out a reporter, no matter how large or small or distant the paper. Across five decades he spoke through the press about his life and *Peanuts*, and in answering what were often the same old questions week after week, year after year, he charted major and minor shifts in his beliefs and opinions, all the while accumulating a vast treasury of commentary about his personality and character.



Schulz once said that his own ordinary appearance as a child was what prompted Charlie Brown's round, ordinary face.

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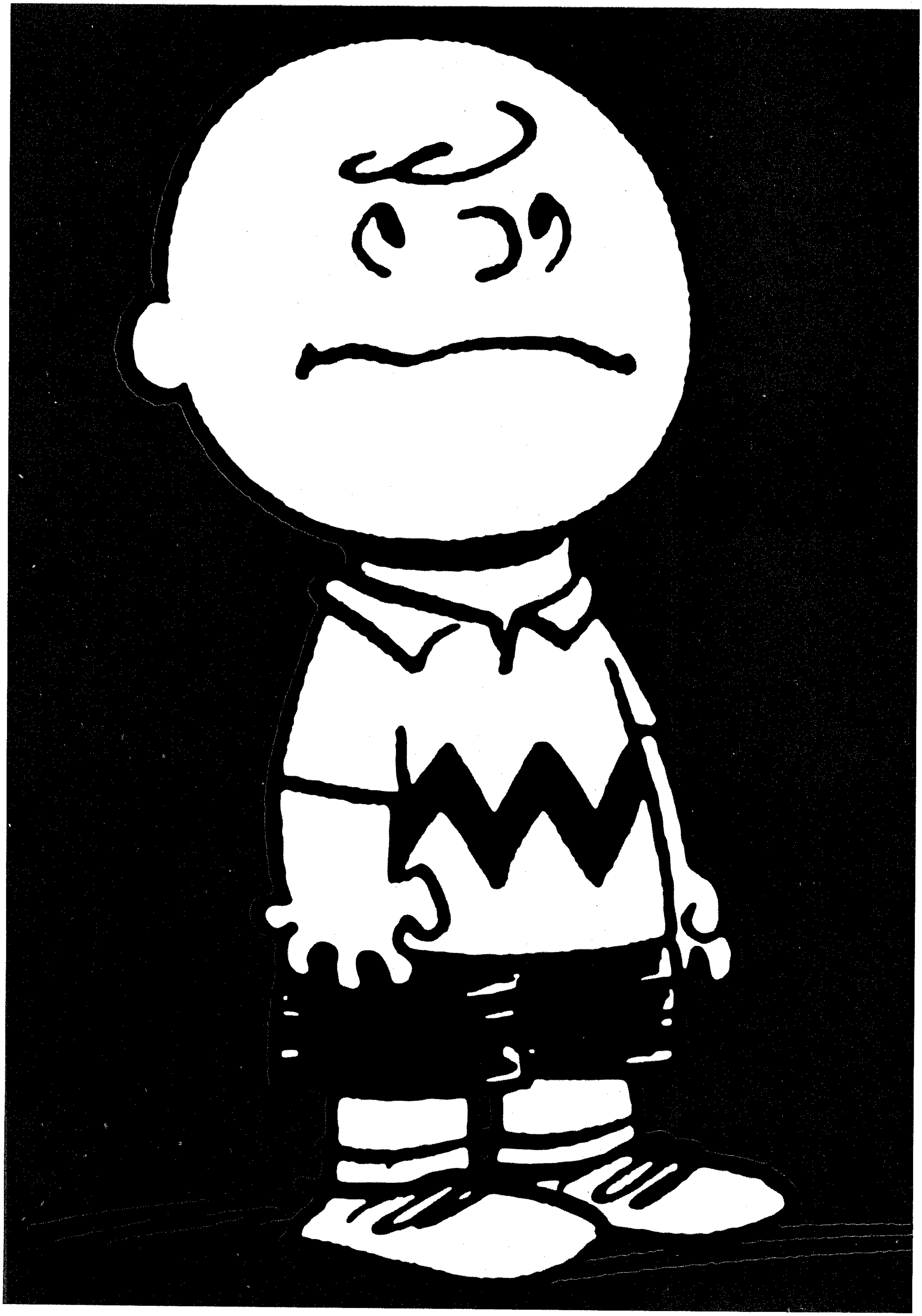
His character was made in Minnesota, and Michaelis has an evocative feel for such period Americana as the ecclesiastical profile of a mid-century Midwestern city:

> Veterans coming home to any midland city found the principal Christian denominations clearly marked: the Episcopalian parish church evoked Anglican tradition in its lavish half-timbering; the Catholic cathedral's domed basilica proclaimed its place in a universal order; Lutheranism showed its stolid presence in brick churches quietly displaying modest, useful banners announcing bingo and bake sales, their pinnacled bell towers culminating in tall Gothic spires; the Methodist and Presbyterian churches, the one built of stone, the other of wood, each thrust a tall white steeple over opposite corners of a well-tended thoroughfare, invariably Church Street.

Amid all this denominational pomp, Michaelis goes on to say, "the Church of God had no defining style or architectural tradition. It barely announced itself." It was to this colorless permutation of Christianity, founded in Indiana in 1881, that the young Schulz attached himself, becoming a tithing pillar and part-time preacher. In the raffish, New York City-centered brotherhood of cartoonists, he was an antisocial, teetotalling, non-smoking oddity. He had never gone to an art school, learning his trade as a student at and then instructor for a Minneapolis learn-by-mail outfit called Art Instruction. "Peanuts" was launched, in 1950, in a squat, space-saving format and under an enigmatic title imposed, to Schulz's lifelong indignation, by the syndicate heads. That same year, his nomination to the National Cartoonists Society was blocked by Otto Soglow, the membership-committee chairman, on the ground that no member—not even his nominator, Mort Walker, of "Beetle Bailey" fame—had ever met him. In 1954, while "Peanuts" was taking off with the public and setting new standards of minimalist subtlety and quiet daring, Schulz came east to the society's awards dinner on the rumor that the coveted Reuben, already bestowed upon Walker and "Dennis the Menace" 's Hank Ketcham, would go to him. Instead, the sports cartoonist Willard Mullin received it. Schulz left without a word of farewell to his tablemates and claimed, back in Minneapolis, that he had been treated like "someone's poor relative."

The pervasive magic of syndicated cartooning in the twentieth century is knowingly sketched by Michaelis, not only in historical terms, from "The Yellow Kid" and "Happy Hooligan" on up through "Gasoline Alley" and "Blondie" and "Joe Palooka" and "Li'l Abner" and—the first strip to captivate intellectuals—"Krazy Kat," but as experienced by the aspiring young Schulz. Born in 1922, he doted on the comic pages, copying "Popeye" and "Tim Tyler's Luck" on his father's shirt cardboards. When, in the Depression years, he earned nine dollars a week as a grocery-store clerk, he was enabled "to work with Bristol board and Higgins India ink and Craftint doubletone." The arcana of the cartoonist's trade were dazzlingly displayed, Michaelis relates, in a 1934 exhibition of comic-strip art at the St. Paul Public Library:

> Here hung several hundred lengths of layered illustration board stroked in dense ink more purely black and warmly alive than the engraving process allowed for. . . . Outside the panels, cryptic instructions had been penciled in the margin; sky-blue arrows



GOINGS ON
ABOUT TOWN:
Photographs
for The New Yorker

Photographs by
Sylvia Plachy

Foreword by
Mark Singer

Afterword by
Elisabeth Biondi

Joyful and
idiosyncratic,
Goings On About Town
is quintessentially
Sylvia Plachy,
and quintessentially
New York.

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THE NEW YORKER

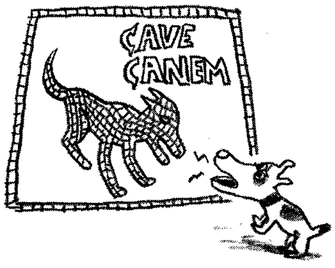
> aimed to catch an editor's eye. Inside the panels, there were unexpected traces of effort: accidental blots, glue stains and tape bits, strips of paper pasted to correct mistakes in lettering, unerased letters, registration marks, residues of white gouache, pentimenti reversing all kinds of slips and false starts—a whole unseen world of reasoning and revision had passed over the drawing board before mechanical reproduction reduced and tightened the lines.

And yet, for all the biographer's animation of the professional and geographical environments that shaped Schulz, he remains somewhat blank and hard to like, with a "cold, untrusting side." An only child, he was a second-generation American on both his German father's side and his Norwegian mother's. Though he signed his strips simply "Schulz" and inherited his father's work ethic, neatness, and devoted pride of profession, he said, "I always regarded myself really as being Norwegian and not German." Yet his mother's hard-drinking, violent-tempered brothers frightened him at Sunday family get-togethers. While German immigrants gravitated to the cities and brought cultural institutions with them, the Norwegians, according to the Minnesotan Sinclair Lewis, "brought nothing new"; they clung to their family farms and clannishly intermarried. Neither ethnic group offered much encouragement to artistic aspirations, or lofty aspirations of any sort: "Don't get a big head" was a mantra of the upper Midwest; the big-headed tots of "Peanuts" emerged as a defiance. Nor was display of the heart prominent; there was not much touching, Michaelis notices, in family photographs or in Schulz's memory. When Sparky—as he was called all his life, nicknamed in infancy after the racehorse Spark Plug in the comic strip "Barney Google"—returned from the Second World War, in which he had seen overseas combat, he entered his father's barbershop and the haircut in progress continued. "No one gave me a hug," the young veteran recalled. "We didn't have any party. . . . That was it." In turn, Schulz was gingerly with his own children and shied from physical affection; his cousin Patty testified, "Hugging him was like hugging a tree—he never moved." At the outset of his wartime service, in 1943, he came home on a day pass to say goodbye to his mother, who was painfully dying of metastasized cervical cancer. In Michaelis's telling: "He said he guessed it was time to go. . . . She turned her gaze as best she could. 'Well,' she said, 'good-bye, Sparky. We'll probably never see each other again.' " A bleaker deathbed blessing has seldom been recorded.

The "Peanuts" empire early and late included bound volumes of the strips, and for some of them, notably the wide-format "Peanuts Jubilee" (1975), Schulz provided, in an economical, unassuming prose, pieces of autobiography between selections of reprinted "Peanuts." His own version of his mother's farewell reads slightly softer than the version above: "Yes, I suppose we should say good-bye because we probably never will see each other again." In another spot he dips into his uncanny childhood sense of himself:

> When I was small, I believed that my face was so bland that people would not recognize me if they saw me some place other than where they normally would. I was sincerely surprised if I happened to be in the downtown area of St. Paul, shopping with my mother, and we would bump into a fellow student at school, or a teacher, and they recognized me. I thought that my ordinary appearance was a perfect disguise. It was this weird kind of thinking that prompted Charlie Brown's round, ordinary face.

Later in the same section, he writes, "Charlie Brown has to be the one who suffers, because he is a caricature of the average person. Most of us are much more acquainted with losing than we are with winning." This from a man who was making four million dollars in 1975 and was to receive, in the twenty-five years ahead, as much as sixty-two million a year, from the proceeds of the world's most widely syndicated strip and of shrewdly managed licenses for merchandise (clothing, books, toys, greeting cards), advertising (cameras, cars, cupcakes, life insurance), translations (Arabic, Basque, Malay, Tlingit, Welsh), animated television specials, and the musical comedy "You're a Good Man, Charlie Brown," which went through forty thousand productions, involving

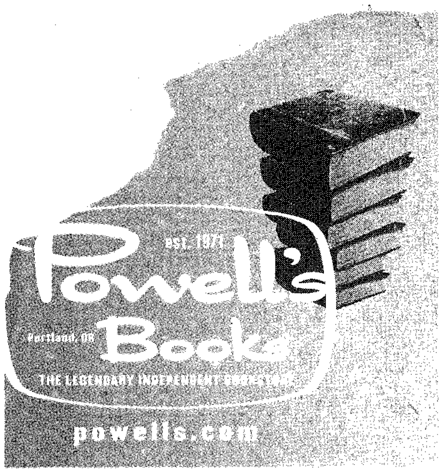


two hundred and forty thousand different performers. Behind the bland face a fiercely competitive spirit blazed; as Snoopy challenged Charlie Brown for the starring role in the strip, his creator bragged, "He is the most recognized character in the world, much more so than Mickey Mouse"—a gratuitous put-down of his mightiest predecessor in multimedia self-exploitation, Walt Disney.

Though short and slight as a boy, Schulz was a passionate athlete, living for after-school baseball games and ranking second on the high-school golf team. As an adult he held a low handicap (Michaelis, an apparent stranger to the terminology, calls Schulz "a scratch golfer, with a five handicap") and played in the Crosby Invitational until midlife agoraphobia curtailed his travels. In an attempt to re-create Minnesotan pleasures in Northern California, Schulz and his first wife, the enterprising Joyce née Halverson, constructed an elaborate skating rink, the Redwood Empire Ice Arena, and there, while Schulz was playing on a hockey team opposing that of his son Monte, "Monte danced away from Sparky during a play, whereupon father slashed son across the backs of his legs so hard that Monte had trouble walking to the locker room." Still mentally smarting years afterward, Monte told Michaelis, "He really injured my leg—an unbelievable welt," and did not recall "that his father apologized until two days later." Nor did Sparky, in Michaelis's account, "express remorse, or show sympathy" when, in 1970, Joyce discovered, through a telltale phone bill, his affair with Tracey Claudius, a twenty-five-year-old employee of the Fairchild Semiconductor Corporation who had tagged along on one of Schulz's innumerable interviews. Interviewed herself years later, Tracey delivered a thoughtful appraisal of her former lover: "He . . . never got over himself. I guess no one had made him the center of the world, so he became the center of his own world." His own self-appraisal put it, "It took me a long time to become a human being."

"She's something and I'm nothing," Charlie Brown says of the object of his hopeless romantic longing, the Little Red-Haired Girl. The young Schulz was invincibly chaste and shy. In 1941, when he was nineteen and working long night hours in an alcove in his parents' attic at gag "roughs" that *Collier's* and the *Saturday Evening Post* faithfully rejected, his mother, earthy, vivacious Dena, suggested that his gags perhaps weren't "smutty" enough. He later confessed, "I couldn't have drawn a 'smutty' cartoon if I had tried." He couldn't even say "damn" or "hell," as his prim father occasionally did. "Maybe there's some kind of a fatal flaw," he speculated. When, in 1950, a red-haired girl did stir him to pursuit and proposal, she married a virgin. Joyce herself had married before, at the age of nineteen; her first groom was a New Mexico cowboy who got her pregnant and deserted her so promptly that the child, a girl, was born back in Minneapolis. Michaelis writes, "When Sparky met her at the party, Joyce was twenty-two years old, divorced, with a baby and a curfew." Both she and his second wife, Jean, are still alive, so they are glimpsed through a mist of discretion. He and Joyce divorced in 1973, after twenty-two years and four more children; from start to finish, she was characterized by friends as "the dynamo of the duo"—brassy where he was wispy, venturesome where he was stay-at-home. She got him, against his inclinations, out of St. Paul—first, abortively, to Colorado Springs, and then, lastingly, to California—which was likely to the good, since he then had to reimagine his childhood instead of merely relive it. (Joyce's explanation of why they returned from Colorado after only nine months was that "Sparky couldn't handle being away from his dad.")

Joyce lives in his comic strips, Michaelis claims, as Charlie Brown's relentless tormentor Lucy Van Pelt. An Art Instruction colleague of Schulz's is quoted: "She and Sparky were a fun couple . . . but there were times when she was pretty nasty to him." To be fair, his passivity and his preoccupation with his strip might have been maddening. Both wanted more than they were getting. In the years of their marriage, he had become a handsome man—slim, fit, silver-haired—as well as a hugely rich national celebrity, and women were beginning to pick up signals. Jean Clyde, sixteen years younger than he, took her daughter to the arena three times a



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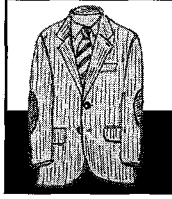

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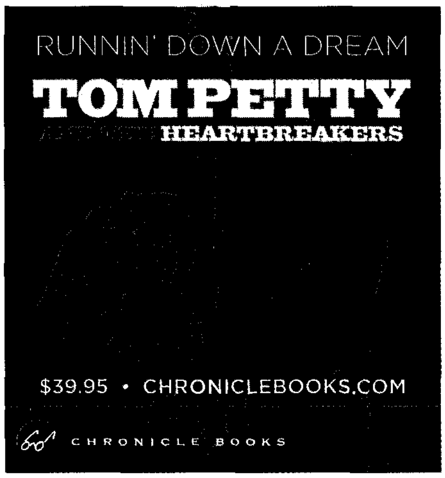
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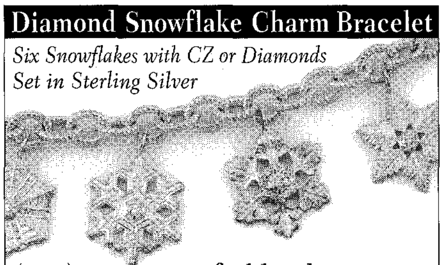
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week, and strode through the coffee shop called the Warm Puppy ("Happiness is a warm puppy"), where Schulz, informally separated from Joyce at this point, daily had his breakfast. Jean—"intelligent and, among the women in Charles Schulz's life, comparatively well educated"—was the daughter of English parents; she had been brought up by her mother on a Southern California avocado ranch, and was the wife of a guitar-playing journalist who had turned to dealing in real estate. Though married to others when they met, Schulz and Jean were divorced and wed within the next year. They moved into what had been a bishop's residence, complete with prayer grotto.

Schulz's own religiosity seems to have quietly faded in the California sunshine, though he continued to contribute a cartoon panel to the Church of God magazine and for a time taught Methodist Sunday school in Sebastopol. His manifold newspaper interviews trace a gradual withdrawal: "I'm not an orthodox believer, and I'm becoming less of one all the time." Robert Short, the author of the immensely successful "The Gospel According to Peanuts" (1964), admitted, "Sparky . . . could sound like the conservatives, but . . . there was always this very humanistic liberal strain that was beneath the surface." In Schulz's strip, the Great Pumpkin episodes verge on travesty if not blasphemy, and in his life he diffidently accepted his children's lack of interest in Sunday school. His daughter Amy, who eventually became a Mormon, complained, "He never read [the Scriptures] to us kids and he never took us to church. He didn't share it with us."

Jean turned Schulz from a golfer into a tennis player. Where Joyce had worked off her leftover energy by going on building sprees (she married their contractor a day after the divorce came through), Jean flew airplanes with her mother and travelled the world with her two children by Mr. Clyde. She saw her new, aging husband through a quadruple heart bypass in 1981 that momentarily left Schulz's precise, dashing pen lines slightly shaky, and then through the colon cancer that carried him off, early in the year 2000, at the age of seventy-seven. His obituary appeared in Sunday papers the very same day as his last strip. "In the moment of ceasing to be a cartoonist, he ceased to be," Michaelis writes. For almost exactly fifty years, he had produced the strip alone—its ideas, its lettering, its every mark on Bristol board were his. Even the mechanical-appearing bars of Beethoven that appear behind Schroeder at his toy piano were hand-drawn by the cartoonist. "I work completely alone," he insisted. Amy recalled, "Were we his everything? No. His strip was his everything."

Michaelis secured permission to reproduce two hundred and forty images from the 17,897 "Peanuts" strips to illustrate how often they were closely derived from Schulz's life. Charlie Brown's insecurity, his longings, his baseball games, his barber father all go back to St. Paul. Snoopy is closely based upon an abnormally clever dog from Schulz's childhood called Spike; as Dena was dying, she said that if they ever had another dog they should name him Snoopy—*snupi* being a Norwegian term of endearment. The beagle's fantasies of the French Foreign Legion and of being a First World War flying ace were based on thirties movies that Schulz had imbibed as a boy in St. Paul's Park Theatre. Closer to adulthood, his affair with Tracey Claudius left blatant traces in the strip. Snoopy, typing away on the roof of his doghouse, parodied Schulz's own feverish love letters. In one of them, he wrote Tracey, "Dark hair and a perfect nose. Soft hands that are sometimes cool and sometimes warm"; Snoopy, lying dreamily on his doghouse roof, thinks, "She had the softest paws. . . . * sigh *." Joyce's discovery of his surreptitious phone calls showed up, Snoopyized, in the strip, as did Schulz's receipt of the summons in the divorce case she subsequently initiated. Snoopy, as Michaelis points out, is a grownup, with a sex life—at the Daisy Hill Puppy Farm—and adult possessions, including a pool table, a stereo, and a van Gogh, somehow crammed into his doghouse. Episodes involving him come to reflect the psychedelic sixties and are relatively free of the backbiting and unrequited love sadly common in the strip's population of children. Snoopy acquires a set of disreputable relatives based upon the male Halversons, and there are desert intervals (reminiscent of "Krazy Kat" 's surreal habitat) derived from the Schulz

THE SPELL CAST OVER

In the old days we could see nakedness only
in the burlesque houses. In the lavish
theatres left over from vaudeville,
ruined in the Great Depression. What had been
grand gestures of huge chandeliers
and mythic heroes courting the goddess
on the ceiling. Now the chandeliers were grimy
and the ceilings hanging in tatters. It was
like the Russian aristocrats fleeing
the Revolution. Ending up as taxi-drivers
in Paris dressed in their worn-out elegance.
It was like that in the Pittsburgh of my days.
Old men of shabby clothes in the empty
seats at the Roxy Theatre dreaming
of the sumptuous headliners
slowly discarding layers of their
lavish gowns. Baring the secret
beauty to the men of their season.
The old men came from their one room
(with its single, forbidden gas range)
to watch the strippers. To remember what used
to be. Like the gray-haired men of Ilium
who waited each morning for Helen
to cross over to the temple in her light raiment.
The waning men longed to escape from the spell
cast over them by time. To escape the imprisoned
longing. To insist on dispensation. To see
their young hearts just one more time.
Those famous women like honeycombs. Women moving
to the old music again. That former grace of flesh.
The sheen of them in the sunlight, to watch
them walking by the sea.

—*Jack Gilbert*

family's brief, ill-fated attempt to transplant itself, in 1929-31, to Needles, in the Mojave region of California.

"Peanuts," of course, was more than a running autobiographical tease, as the reader can reassure himself by leafing through the lavish "Peanuts Jubilee" or its less lavish, rather jumbled successor, twenty-five years later, "Peanuts: A Golden Celebration." The elegant economy of the drawing and the wild inventiveness of such pictorial devices as the towering pitcher's mound and the impossible perspective of Snoopy's doghouse keep the repetitiveness, talkiness, and melancholy of the strip a few buoyant inches off the ground, and save it from being fey. With the introduction, in 1970, of Snoopy's friend the tiny yellow bird Woodstock, Schulz gave himself access to a whole fresh realm of tenderness; a sort of parenthood at last crept into the strip, where human parents are invisible. And yet, in the end, it was the woeful personal undercurrent—the frozen memory of a grade-school loser's unshakable existential angst, a child alone behind his unrecognizably bland face—that set "Peanuts" apart and attracted the devoted loyalty of millions, including future celebrants like the artists Chip Kidd and Chris Ware and writers like Jonathan Lethem and Jonathan Franzen. As Schulz said, most of us are better acquainted with losing than with winning. "Peanuts" was a unique creation, a comic strip at bottom tragic. ♦

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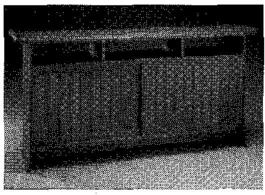

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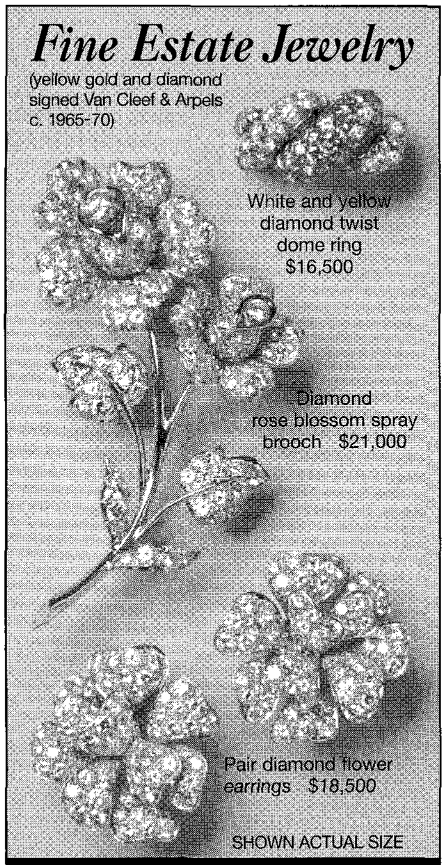
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BOOKS

ROCKET MAN

The complex orbits of Wernher von Braun.

BY THOMAS MALLON

America's long-ago trips to the moon are now remembered mostly amid the knickknackery of eBay, a nostalgia niche for space buffs who might otherwise engross themselves in the relics of radio serials and baseball dynasties. The handful of surviving septuagenarians who actually walked on the lunar surface have little hope of living to see humans land on Mars, even though, as decades pass, such an enterprise continues to be fitfully proclaimed and underfunded. For more than thirty years, manned space flight has been a matter not of exploration but of commuting, frequent-flier mileage interrupted by occasional disaster on the way to or from low earth orbit. Anyone who has pondered the lives of shuttle astronauts will not have been surprised by the recent rumor—denied by NASA—that they sometimes show up drunk to the launch pad.

Michael J. Neufeld, the author of "Von Braun: Dreamer of Space, Engineer of War" (Knopf; $35), acknowledges that "hardly anyone under age forty" knows his subject's name, even though America's moon shots owed a large measure of their success to him. Wernher von Braun (1912-77) had a career that was itself a kind of two-stage rocket, his scientific dreams boosted toward their late American fulfillment by his youthful service to the military apparatus of Nazi Germany. Disgusted and forbearing by turns, Neufeld, the chair of the Space History Division at the Smithsonian's National Air and Space Museum, offers this patient new biography as a corrective to the scientific and moral shakiness of the more admiring writers who have come before him. Using archival information that they neglected, he has nonetheless faced the same "inaccessibility of [von Braun's] widow, his children, and his American relatives," who seem to regard all biographical study of von Braun as a kind of posthumous deportation hearing, one that always carries the possibility of his being ejected from the American Cold War pantheon and repatriated to the ruins of the Third Reich.

Magnus von Braun, the rocketeer's father, eventually compared his son to Columbus. A proud Prussian Junker, whose family had once been friendly with Kant, the elder von Braun was a dutiful civil servant who for a short period during the First World War acted as press secretary to the German chancellor. His inborn distrust of democracy was deepened by the postwar upheavals that finally sent him into banking. According to Neufeld, his middle son, Wernher, inherited from Magnus an "ability to land on his feet through multiple changes of fortune"; it was from his scientifically curious mother that the boy is thought to have acquired the gusto with which he used the telescope he received the year he turned thirteen.

Life at a boarding school just north of Weimar reinforced the anti-democratic sentiments he got from his father, but Wernher's exposure to Hermann Oberth's pamphlet "The Rocket Into Interplanetary Space" sparked a romantic obsession that was soon in full adolescent flower. At sixteen, home in Berlin on vacation from school, von Braun launched a wagon powered by a half-dozen toy rockets down the Tiergarten Allee. The fleeing pedestrians occasioned in him no Kantian consideration of means versus ends: "It never occurred to me," he later recalled, "that they were not prepared to share the sidewalk with my noble experiment."

A few years later, while studying at the Berlin-Charlottenburg Institute of Technology and participating in a space-flight society, von Braun joined some exuberant young colleagues in repeated tests of the unstable Repulsor rocket, which was based on Oberth's design and fuelled by a combination of gasoline and liquid oxygen. The launches were financed in part by tour groups that paid to watch, but the renascent German military soon became the most intent observer of the excitement in Berlin's *Raketenflugplatz*. Captain Walter Dornberger, a leading figure in the Army's rocket-development program, took special notice of von Braun, and his "paternal advice, encouragement, and restraint" made him an ideal protector and boss for years to come. Von Braun, who once declared, "All I really want is a rich uncle," was eager to have the Army's money, even if that now meant substituting secrecy for publicity seeking. Neufeld offers "a qualified yes" to the question of whether von Braun could have been, at this youthful point, "as apolitical and naïve" as he later claimed. The rocket-builder turned twenty-one on March 23, 1933, the day the Reichstag gave Hitler dictatorial powers.

Von Braun saw the weaponizing of rockets as a kind of awkward adolescence for the vehicles, whose true destiny would arrive when they took men to other planets. In the meantime, he was content to let his military superiors imagine his creations carrying explosives or poison gas instead of passengers. In late 1934, successful testing of the Aggregat 2 (A-2) rocket prompted von Braun to take a Christmas vacation in London; after this quick respite, he returned to the rivalrous military culture in which both the Army and Hermann Göring's Luftwaffe were eager to hurl money at further missile development. In 1937, von Braun, only twenty-five, was put in charge of three hundred and fifty people, as his liquid-fuel-rocket group moved to a remote location on the Baltic coast near the fishing village of Peenemünde, a spot recommended by von Braun's mother. For the next several years, he integrated an enormous operation that sought to perfect, and then mass-produce, the A-4 rocket, which the Propaganda Ministry in Berlin soon preferred to call the Vengeance Weapon, or V-2.

Neufeld catches von Braun in one ethically supine moment after another, laying out the evidence of increasing complicity, which von Braun and his later American bosses, determined to protect a major Cold War asset, eventually had to cover up. When anything mitigating or exculpatory seems to surface, it gets put on the scales. The photograph that the author develops darkens only gradually. Von Braun displays "selective memory" and "moral obtuseness," flashes of guilt but nothing ever approaching an acceptance of responsibility for his part in the Reich's predations.

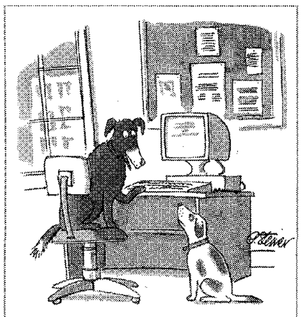
After joining the Nazi Party, in 1937, the result of a "campaign to recruit nonmembers in positions of authority and social influence," von Braun seems to have done little more "than send in his monthly dues." When, three years later, he was pressured to join the S.S., he didn't have the strength of character to risk his career by saying no, but he was reluctant to wear the uniform. He had five encounters with Hitler; at one of them, he had to force himself not to talk about space travel instead of ballistics. Initially cool to what Peenemünde was producing, the Führer, by the middle of 1943, began to see the prospect of salvation in the V-2 and ordered manufacture of the weapon on a scale wildly incongruent with its level of technical refinement. It was this strategic overreaching, more than any perception of the Reich's brutality, that seems to have set in motion von Braun's "alienation from the regime."

Von Braun, at the Marshall Space Flight Center, during a 1962 Presidential visit.

BOB GOMEL/TIME LIFE PICTURES/GETTY IMAGES

He may not have liked using slave labor to increase V-2 production, but he did not protest. During the last years of the war, thousands of rag-clad prisoners from the Dora concentration camp unloaded parts for the gleaming rockets and

HUMOROUS HOUNDS



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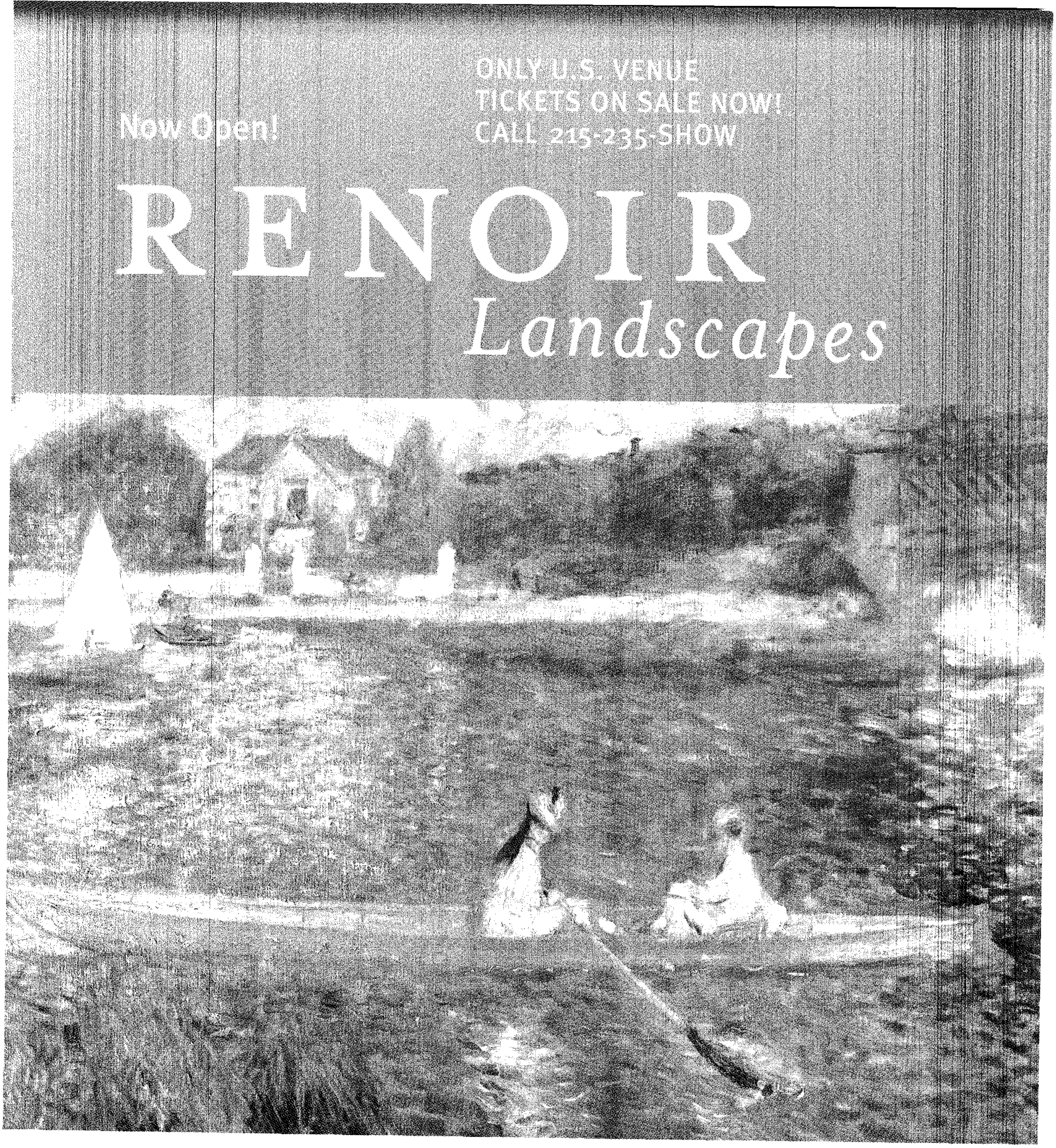
then returned to underground tunnels to sleep, and be beaten, in conditions of almost unimaginable filth and contagion. The death rates were astonishing (five thousand in the first three months of 1944), and, whether or not von Braun saw any of the beatings or hangings to which his fellow S.S. officers subjected the prisoners, Neufeld makes it meticulously clear that "he saw a lot." Ten years ago, in a passionate introduction to "Planet Dora," Yves Béon's memoir of life in the camp, Neufeld laid out the conditions in even more horrifying detail, while swatting away von Braun as "basically an apolitical opportunist." Here the biographer's effort "to be fair" to his subject seems hard won and credibly devastating. Neufeld argues that von Braun could have been charged with committing war crimes on at least two occasions, had he been judged by the same Nuremberg standard used for Albert Speer, who had looked out for Peenemünde in the German military's competition for funds.

The luckiest break of von Braun's life probably came in 1944, when he was arrested by the Gestapo for some loose, pessimistic talk at a party. Quickly sprung with the assistance of Dornberger and Speer, he now had a kind of anti-Nazi credential to sport in the postwar world that was fast arriving. For the rest of his life, von Braun's activities at Dora went mostly unmentioned in magazine profiles and interviews, but his arrest by Hitler's police tended to figure prominently, no matter that it occurred nine months before von Braun accepted a Knight's Cross from Speer at an eerie ceremony held inside a North Rhine castle. Von Braun and three other honorees received their medals, minutes apart, between launchings of the V-2 against Antwerp, "the room suddenly lit with the flickering light of the rocket's exhaust and slightly shaken by the reverberations of its engine," according to Dornberger, one of the medalists.

Nearly all who have recollected and written about von Braun attest to his generous endowments of charm, optimism, and physical energy. Sleekly handsome, blond and well built, he was in his youth nicknamed Sonny Boy, after the Al Jolson song, for his ability to make gray skies seem blue. Attractive to women, a hale hunting and drinking companion, he was an inspiring boss, loyal to individual associates and family. Even Neufeld, consistently serious in his enterprise, sometimes has to resist writing of von Braun as if he were the amiable protagonist of an adventure novel. As the Allies closed in during the spring of 1945, von Braun appears more mischievous than desperate. He doesn't just wait for the Americans; he goes looking for them, knowing they will want his expertise and betting that they can make his long-deferred dreams of space travel come true. On May 3, 1945, two days before the Russians overran Peenemünde, von Braun ends up dining on scrambled eggs and posing for pictures with the 44th U.S. Infantry Division, to whom he has just surrendered. He makes clear how much expertise he has to offer and shows remorse for nothing beyond the lost opportunity to have perfected the V-2 before the game was up.

But a new game was very much on. If the Americans thought first of von Braun's potential usefulness to them in the protracted war that was still expected in the Pacific, they quickly redeployed him against the Soviet threat. By the fall of 1945, von Braun and dozens of ex-Peenemünders were beginning to arrive at Fort Bliss, near El Paso, from which some of them would commute by bus to White Sands, New Mexico, in order to launch, and continue perfecting, a cache of captured V-2s. Von Braun adjusted fast to his new employers, however strictly they supervised his comings and goings—especially a 1947 trip back to Germany in order to marry a much younger first cousin, during which there were fears of a possible kidnap attempt by the Soviets.

Von Braun also adapted to both the forward-looking conveniences and traditional pieties of American life. He marvelled at the comforts of Southern California and underwent an evangelical conversion inside a little white frame church in El Paso, an experience that Neufeld treats with respectful reserve, conceding that it may have originated in von Braun's anxiety about the nuclear weapons he expected to become involved with. Still, the biographer notes that within a few years von Braun, characteristically, traded up from that white frame congregation to a more socially prominent Episcopal one.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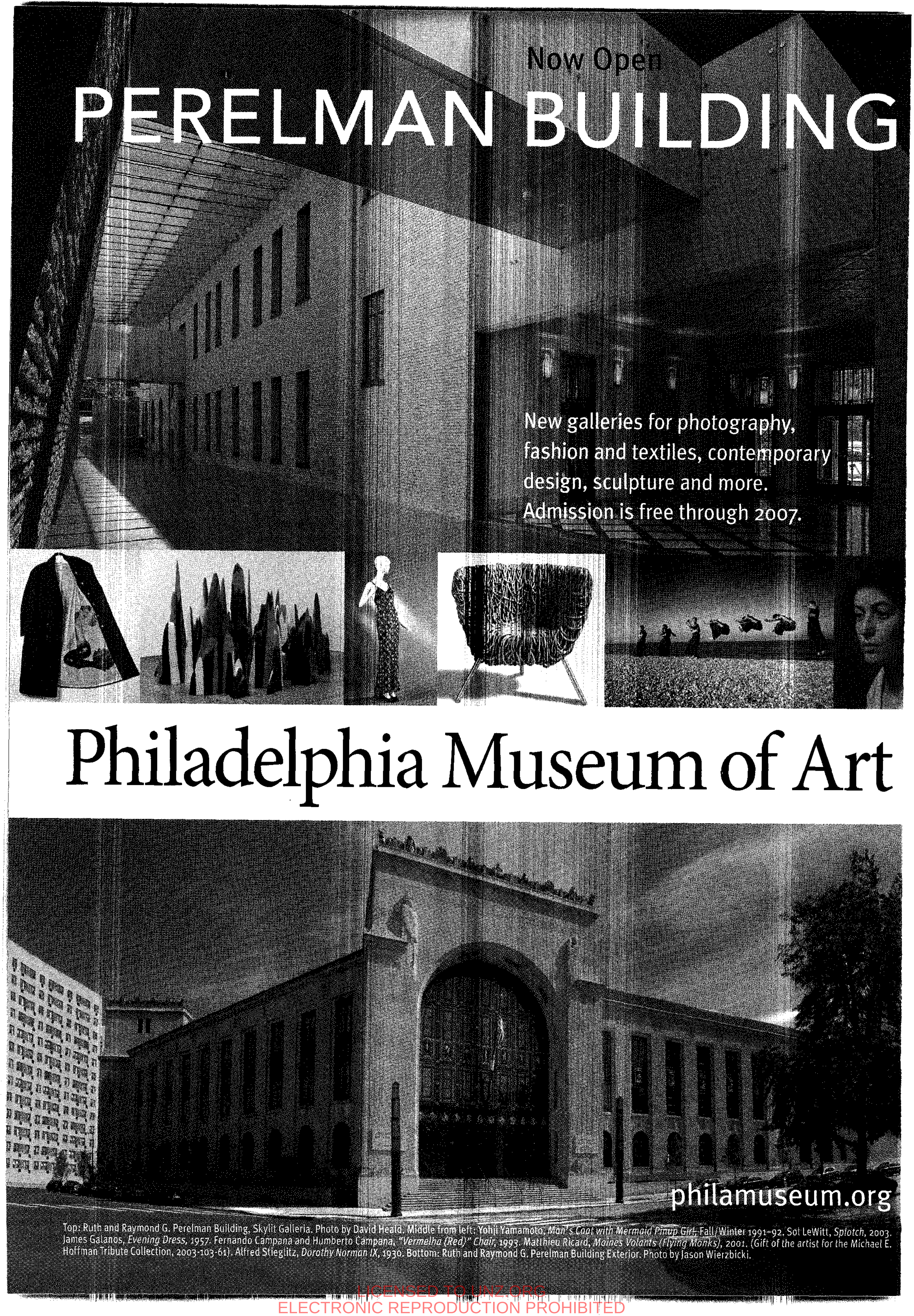
The Skiff (La Yole), 1875 (detail). The National Gallery, London.

Now Open

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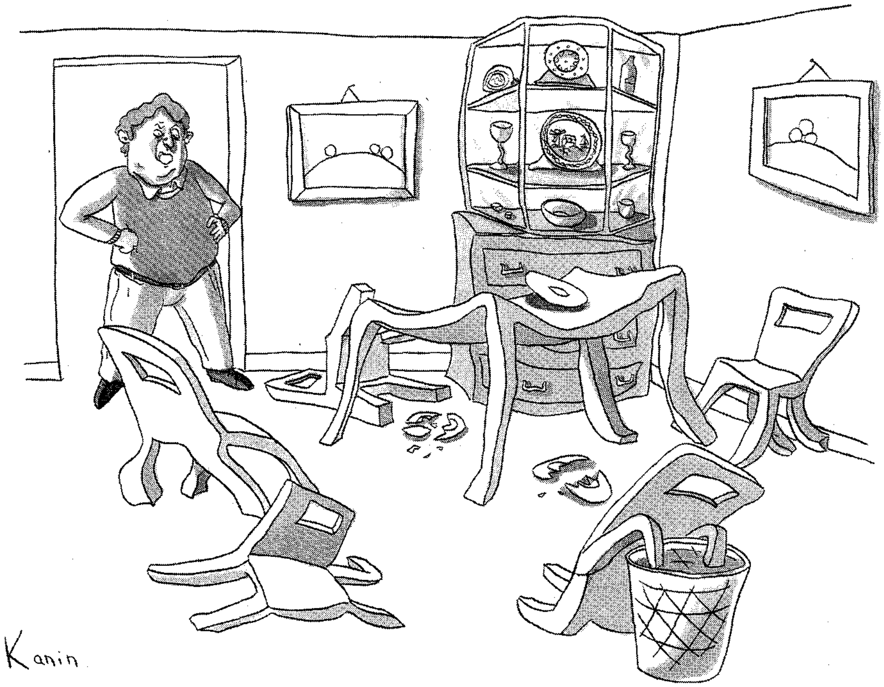
Top: Ruth and Raymond G. Perelman Building, Skylit Galleria. Photo by David Heald. Middle from left: Yohji Yamamoto, *Man's Coat with Mermaid Pinup Girl*, Fall/Winter 1991–92. Sol LeWitt, *Splotch*, 2003. James Galanos, *Evening Dress*, 1957. Fernando Campana and Humberto Campana, *"Vermelha (Red)" Chair*, 1993. Matthieu Ricard, *Moines Volants (Flying Monks)*, 2001. (Gift of the artist for the Michael E. Hoffman Tribute Collection, 2003-103-61). Alfred Stieglitz, *Dorothy Norman IX*, 1930. Bottom: Ruth and Raymond G. Perelman Building Exterior. Photo by Jason Wierzbicki.

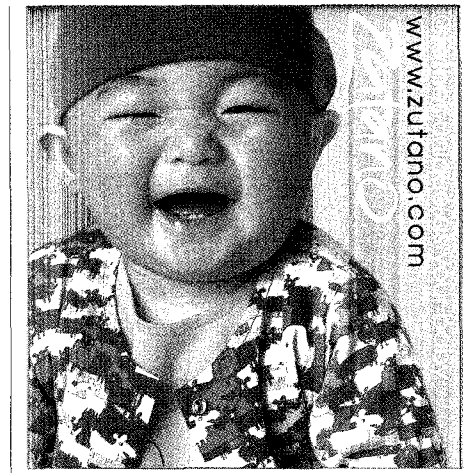
Von Braun spent most of his long American career in Huntsville, Alabama, first as the director of the Army's Ordnance Guided Missile Center, where he developed the Redstone rocket, a direct descendant of the V-2, and came to oversee a domain comparable to Peenemünde. In Neufeld's narrative of the nineteen-fifties, Soviet-American rivalry seems less prominent than the interservice missile competitions of the U.S. military: the Army's Jupiter program, the Air Force's Thor, and the Navy's Vanguard all wanted dibs on Armageddon. Von Braun knew that he was in the same means-and-ends predicament he'd been in since Walter Dornberger first walked into the *Raketenflugplatz*, two decades earlier: if he was ever to crown his missiles with men, he would first have to let them carry bombs.

But here in America, even while working for the Army, he was allowed, within limits, to pursue a parallel career as an advocate of space exploration. Von Braun started small, addressing the El Paso Rotary Club in 1947, then moving on to write a novel, which he managed to publish in Germany, about the human settlement of Mars. His wheel-shaped model for a space station—a military necessity, he argued—appeared in *Popular Science*, and three heavily promoted special issues of *Collier's*, each devoted to space flight, began making him famous. The second of these imagined a moon landing carried out by a fifty-man crew. (Von Braun never gave much thought to robot explorers, in part because, still in his early forties, he remained hopeful of going into space himself.) True celebrity arrived in 1955, the year he became an American citizen, with his participation in the Disney broadcast "Man in Space." He was now the face, and voice, of his millenarian cause; his German accent "fit an American cliché of scientific gravity."

It was, of course, the Soviets' surprise launch of Sputnik that turned space exploration, manned and unmanned, into the Cold War's second, celestial front, a peaceful competition more attractive than the ongoing ballistic one. In the catch-up rush to launch the first U.S. satellite—Explorer I reached space in January, 1958, four months after Sputnik—the Juno rocket that von Braun developed for the Army beat out all the other American military services. President Eisenhower didn't much like the designer, who was now pushing for too much money too quickly and too publicly, but Senate Majority Leader Lyndon Johnson and a cluster of Capitol Hill committees were won over. "Only J. Edgar Hoover has a comparably dissolving effect on congressmen," the columnist Mary McGrory wrote. "The hardest thing the German-born scientist has to do is to say 'down, boy' as [they] press additional millions on him and beg him to



"Who let the dining-room set into the liquor cabinet again?"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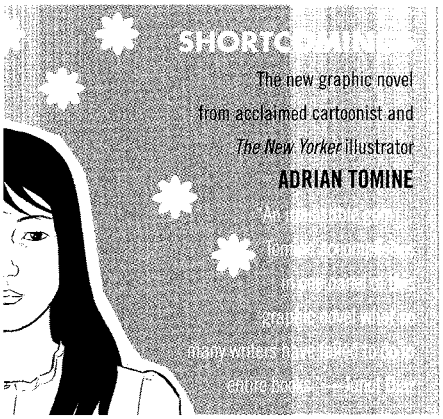
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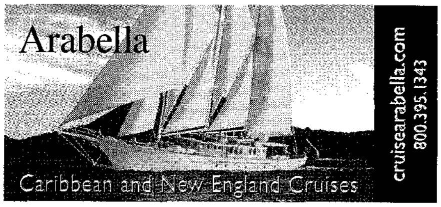
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tell them if he isn't treated right." Cover stories in *Time* and *Der Spiegel* mentioned the Gestapo arrest but not von Braun's Party membership, let alone the S.S. and Dora; his lecture fees soared, and in 1960 he escorted Mamie Eisenhower to the première of "I Aim at the Stars," a movie based, with more than usual looseness, on his life story. Mort Sahl suggested a subtitle: "But Sometimes I Hit London."

Von Braun's enormous Huntsville operation was folded into NASA, the new space agency, and John F. Kennedy's 1961 pledge to reach the moon by decade's end turned that sphere into a glowering "deadline display device," as von Braun put it in a letter to his aging father. His job was to prepare the huge Saturn V rocket for the journey. The man he put in charge of its production was Arthur Rudolph, a Peenemünde colleague who, twenty years before, had shown special eagerness to use the slave laborers of Dora. Lyndon Johnson, after reaching the White House, gave von Braun a cowboy hat and told him he wanted to see it on the moon. Once Armstrong, Aldrin, and Collins had got there and back—the Saturn V proved amazingly reliable—von Braun was paraded through Huntsville on the shoulders of its citizens.

Throughout his book, Neufeld refuses to use the term "rocket scientist," not because of its goofy cultural currency but because of its strict inapplicability to his subject. Despite a doctorate in physics, von Braun was, from Peenemünde to Huntsville, "an engineer and a manager of engineers," an integrator of systems with a gift for selling them to whatever officials might continue their funding. Von Braun may have been a visionary with a penchant for the gigantic, but his engineering style tended toward the cautious, even during the deadline-driven days of the V-2 and Project Apollo. He was a late convert to the daring LOR (Lunar-Orbit Rendezvous) strategy, which speeded up the moon landings, and he was only accepting a strategy conceived by others when he implemented NASA's policy of accelerated, "all-up" testing, which eliminated many flights of the Saturn's individual stages and components in favor of a few that tested them all together. The V-2 may have been "a revolutionary breakthrough in rocket technology," but by the early sixties, Neufeld writes, von Braun "had not had a really new idea in years."

The period after Apollo 11 seems to have been the only depressing part of his life. Democracy being what it is, he could not overcome the public's sudden indifference toward a mission to Mars, "the ultimate objective of his life's work." Von Braun grabbed a portion of the timid space-shuttle project for Huntsville, if only to keep the facility there flourishing and to sustain the dwindling chance that he himself might yet go into space. In the early nineteen-seventies, he served a brief Washington tour as NASA's deputy associate administrator and discovered that he could no longer charm the congressional committees the way he used to. Carl Sagan, not an admirer, replaced him as the popular face of space, while journalists and even talk-show hosts began to ask discomfiting questions about his German past. In 1967, von Braun received the Smithsonian's Langley Medal for aeronautical achievement; a decade later, the usually flexible David Gergen kept the Ford White House from giving him the Presidential Medal of Freedom. The most conspicuous landmark to bear von Braun's name—presumably to the delight of Mort Sahl—is a crater, at the western rim of the moon's Oceanus Procellarum.

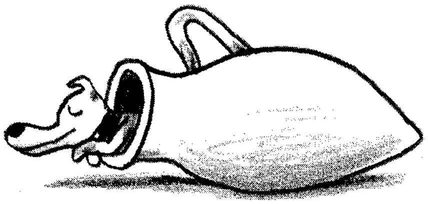
From a career standpoint, von Braun's death, in 1977, at the age of sixty-five, may have been as lucky as it was premature, since the worst disclosures about his past—his S.S. membership and complicity in slave labor—were soon to achieve general circulation. In 1984, facing even worse revelations, Arthur Rudolph chose to renounce his American citizenship and return, after nearly forty years, to Germany. It is difficult to visit the Saturn rocket displayed today in Houston, on its side, without hearing the ghosts in the machine.

Men no longer travel far from Earth, but a few of their mechanical creations continue to sail beyond the edges of the solar system. The Voyager 1 spacecraft, launched on a "grand tour" of the planets less than three months after von Braun's death, is now about ten billion miles from us, carrying with it recorded "greetings on behalf of the people" of Earth. They are spoken by the fourth Secretary-General of the United Nations, Kurt Waldheim. ♦

BRIEFLY NOTED

Mister Pip, *by Lloyd Jones (Dial; $20).* In the midst of a savage civil war, an adolescent girl on the remote island of Bougainville, "where the most unspeakable things happened without once raising the ire of the outside world," is engrossed by the struggle between art, in the form of her eccentric white teacher's reading of "Great Expectations," and religion, represented by her mother's "beloved pidgin Bible." It's not much of a contest—Matilda's heart is instantly captured by Pip—but it precipitates a violent dénouement that leads to her eventual escape. The fablelike simplicity of Matilda's telling belies the complexity of the novel, which takes several subtle and unexpected turns. Most gratifying is the increasing strength and clarity of Matilda's voice as she recounts the journey she makes after leaving the island, one that leads to researching a Dickens thesis in the British Library and, ultimately, repudiating his style: "I learned there is a place for embellishment after all. But it belongs to life—not to literature."

The Air We Breathe, *by Andrea Barrett (Norton; $24.95).* Barrett's novel is narrated in the first-person plural by the patients of a tuberculosis sanitorium in the Adirondacks in 1916, some of whom are drawn from a previous collection of short stories. The invalids, their lives thwarted by illness, poverty, and social convention, have little to do but gossip. As the war in Europe fills the news, paranoia takes hold—in ways that suggest a commentary on our own times—and, when the sanitorium burns, agents provocateurs are suspected. Unfortunately, the work's large-scale ambitions often seem to crowd out imaginative investment in the characters and their fates. But Barrett's powers of historical evocation, especially her knowledge of the scientific preoccupations of the time, are impressive.



The Argument, *by Matt Bai (Penguin Press; $25.95).* Offering a conspectus of "shareholder revolt" in the Democratic Party, Bai, a political reporter for the *Times Magazine*, describes how, after John Kerry's defeat, two sets of insurgents determined, separately, to uproot the Party's sclerotic Washington establishment: a cabal of billionaire liberal donors fed up with "being treated like an ATM with arms and legs," and a self-styled guerrilla force of Internet gunslingers. To these outsiders, the Democrats had started to look like an "industrial behemoth"—Bai draws a comparison with General Motors—with no new ideas and an inability to sell themselves to the public. But, for all the talk of revolution, the outsiders have rapidly become insiders (Exhibit A: the D.N.C. chairman, Howard Dean), and Bai feels that they are obsessed with refining tactics at the expense of shaping the wider political agenda. Of course—as the 2006 midterm elections demonstrated—if voters hate the other guy more, nothing else may be necessary.

The Ordeal of Elizabeth Marsh, *by Linda Colley (Pantheon; $27.50).* Elizabeth Marsh, the daughter of a shipwright, was conceived in Jamaica, was born in England in 1735, and died in Calcutta in 1785. Marsh's extraordinarily peripatetic life illuminates not only the vast global changes of that period, both for the British Empire and for private citizens, but also the almost limitless resources of her own indomitable spirit. Colley shows how Marsh's ties, through a prosperous uncle, to the Royal Navy, were essential to her travels but did not always protect her. At twenty, as the sole female aboard a merchant ship bound for Lisbon, she was captured by Barbary pirates and taken to Morocco. To escape she pretended to be married to her sailing companion, James Crisp. They did eventually wed, but Marsh later spent more than a year travelling through India with another man. Marsh, as evoked in this vivid account, seems an embodiment of the insatiable Empire that created her.

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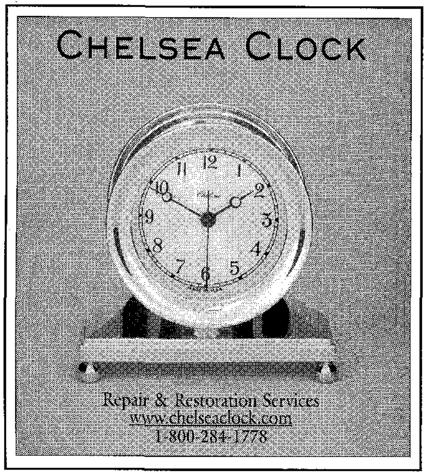

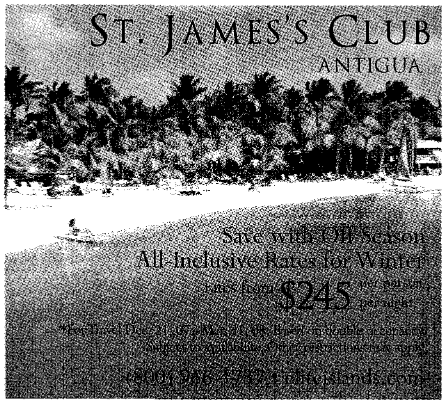

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How indie rock lost its soul.

BY SASHA FRERE-JONES

In May, I went with a friend to see the Canadian indie-rock band Arcade Fire perform at the United Palace, a gilded rococo church in Washington Heights that seats more than three thousand and doubles as a theatre. The band was playing to a noisily receptive crowd during what has been a very successful year. Arcade Fire's latest album, "Neon Bible," which was released here in March, has sold more than three hundred thousand copies—an impressive number for an indie band during an industry-wide sales slump—and the group was on its second visit to New York in three months.

The band, six men and three women, shared the stage with half a dozen curved screens and slender red fluorescent lights, which encircled the musicians like a ring of candles. In January, at a less elaborate show in a small London church, the band's members had called to mind Salvation Army volunteers who had forgotten to go home after Christmas—their execution was ragged but full of brio—and I had spent the evening happily pressed against the stage. At the United Palace, even though the music was surging in all the right places, I was weary after six songs. My friend asked me, "Do they play everything in the same end-of-the-world style?"

Arcade Fire's singer and songwriter, Win Butler, writes lyrics that allude to big, potentially buzz-killing themes: guilt, rapture, death, redemption. And because, for the most part, he deals convincingly with these ideas, the band has been likened to older bands known for passion and gravitas, including the Clash. (On tour, Arcade Fire sometimes plays a cover of the Clash's anti-police-brutality anthem "Guns of Brixton.")

By the time I saw the Clash, in 1981, it was finished with punk music. It had just released "Sandinista!," a three-LP set consisting of dub, funk, rap, and Motown interpretations, along with other songs that were indebted—at least in their form—to Jamaican and African-American sources. As I watched Arcade Fire, I realized that the drummer and the bassist rarely played syncopated patterns or lingered in the low registers. If there is a trace of soul, blues, reggae, or funk in Arcade Fire, it must be philosophical; it certainly isn't audible. And what I really wanted to hear, after a stretch of raucous sing-alongs, was a bit of swing, some empty space, and palpable bass frequencies—in other words, attributes of African-American popular music.

There's no point in faulting Arcade Fire for what it doesn't do; what's missing from the band's musical DNA is missing from dozens of other popular and accomplished rock bands' as well—most of them less entertaining than Arcade Fire. I've spent the past decade wondering why rock and roll, the most miscegenated popular music ever to have existed, underwent a racial re-sorting in the nineteen-nineties. Why did so many white rock bands retreat from the ecstatic singing and intense, voicelike guitar tones of the blues, the heavy African downbeat, and the elaborate showmanship that characterized black music of the mid-twentieth century? These are the volatile elements that launched rock and roll, in the nineteen-fifties, when Elvis Presley stole the world away from Pat Boone and moved popular music from the head to the hips.

It's difficult to talk about the racial pedigree of American pop music without being accused of reductionism, essentialism, or worse, and such suspicion is often warranted. In the case of many popular genres, the respective contributions of white and black musical traditions are nearly impossible to measure. In the nineteen-twenties, folk music was being recorded for the first time, and it was not always clear where the songs—passed from generation to generation and place to place—had come from. The cadence of African slave hollers shaped the rising and falling patterns of blues singing, but there

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JOHN RITTER

is still debate about the origins of the genre's basic chord structure—I-IV-V—and how that progression became associated with a singing style on plantations and in Southern prisons. In 1952, the record collector Harry Smith released "Anthology of American Folk Music," a highly regarded compilation (and, later, a source for Bob Dylan), which showed that white "country" performers and black "blues" artists had recorded similar material in the nineteen-twenties and thirties, singing about common legends, such as "Stackalee," over similar chord progressions. Even the call-and-response singing that is integral to many African-American church services may have been brought to America by illiterate Scottish immigrants who learned Scripture by singing it back to the pastor as he read it to them.

Yet there are also moments in the history of pop music when it's not difficult to figure out whose chocolate got in whose peanut butter. In 1960, on a train between Dartford and London, Mick Jagger and Keith Richards, then teen-agers, bonded over a shared affinity for obscure blues records. (Jagger lent Richards an LP by Muddy Waters.) "Twist and Shout," a song that will forever be associated with the Beatles, is in fact a fairly faithful rendition of a 1962 R. & B. cover by the Isley Brothers. In sum, as has been widely noted, the music that inspired some of the most commercially successful rock bands of the sixties and seventies—among them Led Zeppelin, Cream, and Grand Funk Railroad—was American blues and soul.

The Beatles, especially in Paul McCartney's compositions, married blues and soul with the verse-chorus-bridge structure common to songs from the English music hall and Tin Pan Alley, and hooked teen-agers on a combination of Irving Berlin and Muddy Waters that previously would have been unthinkable. Similarly, when Mick Jagger stopped trying to imitate Bobby Womack he became, musically speaking, an original—a product of miscegenation. He sang with weird menace and charm, and with an accent that placed him in an unidentifiable neighborhood (with more than one bar) somewhere over the Atlantic Ocean. Jagger's knock-kneed dancing may have begun as an homage to Little Richard's exuberant hamming, but he eventually devised his own style—a bewitching flexion of knees and elbows.

The borrowing went both ways. Keith Richards wanted a horn section to play the main guitar riff in the Stones' 1965 single "(I Can't Get No) Satisfaction," on the theory that this would make the song sound like an American soul track. But the song was recorded without a horn section, and immediately became popular, inspiring several covers. One of the better ones was by Otis Redding. ("Otis Redding got it right," Richards said.)

Until Michael Jackson, another soul singer, achieved international prominence, in the late seventies, however, some of the most successful venders of American black music were not black. MTV had been on the air for nearly two years before it got up the courage to play the video for Jackson's "Billie Jean," in 1983. (Jackson was the first black artist to appear on the channel, though it had played videos by the equally gifted white soul act Hall & Oates.) Jackson's 1982 album "Thriller" is the second-biggest-selling record of all time (after "Eagles: Their Greatest Hits 1971-1975"), but he alone could not alter pop music's racial power balance. Black and white musicians continued to trade, borrow, and steal from one another, but white artists typically made more money and received more acclaim. This pattern held until 1992, when the Los Angeles rapper and producer Dr. Dre released "The Chronic," an album whose star performer was a new rapper named Snoop Doggy Dogg.

You could argue that Dr. Dre and Snoop were the most important pop musicians since Bob Dylan and the Beatles. There had already been several important hip-hop hits: the 1979 single "Rapper's Delight," by the Sugarhill Gang, which marked the genre's commercial début; the 1986 remake of "Walk This Way," a rap-like song by the white seventies rock band Aerosmith that the group rerecorded with the black hip-hop trio Run-DMC (as pure an example of musical miscegenation as there can be); and the 1988 album "Straight Outta Compton," by Dr. Dre's group N.W.A., which helped make sampling and sexually violent lyrics central to hip-hop's aesthetic.

"The Chronic," which has sold more than five million copies, upended established paradigms. It presented rappers chanting over smooth funk played on live instruments, as well as over grainy digital samples of old records, and in doing so it changed hip-hop's sound. It started a conceptual migration, establishing the template for hip-hop from outside New York—especially in the South, a region that has recently come to dominate the genre. Hip-hop became music for driving; it was designed to soothe. (The heavy bass frequencies cause car seats to vibrate, literally massaging the passengers.) The menace was now limited to the lyrics, which featured increasingly explicit tales of gunplay and sex, creating a dissonance between sound and sense that typifies gangsta rap even today.

Videos of songs from "The Chronic" were broadcast on MTV, and Snoop, then a twenty-year-old former gang member from Long Beach, California, who delivered his grim narratives with laid-back aplomb, became the face of hip-hop for many people who had little experience with the genre. If young white musicians had been imitating black ones, it was partly because they had been able to do so in the dark, so to speak. In 1969, most of Led Zeppelin's audience would have had no idea that Robert Plant and Jimmy Page had taken some of the lyrics of "Whole Lotta Love" from the blues artist Willie Dixon, whom the band had already covered twice (with credit) on its début album. (After Dixon sued Led Zeppelin, the band credited him with the song.)

By the mid-nineties, the biggest rock stars in the world were rappers, and the potential for embarrassment had become a sufficient deterrent for white musicians tempted to emulate their black heroes. Who would take on Snoop, one of the most naturally gifted vocalists of the day? Of course, a few did—there have been white rappers and several commercial, if generally unappealing, blends of rock and rap. But, in the thirty years since hip-hop became widely available, there have been only three genuinely popular white rap acts: the Beastie Boys, whose biggest-selling album sold to kids who were more taken with the Led Zeppelin samples and the lewd jokes than with the rap music; Vanilla Ice, an anomaly who owes much of his success to his vertical hair and the decision to rap (in "Ice Ice Baby") over "Under Pressure," a song by David Bowie and Queen that has proved immune to destruction; and Eminem, the exception who proves the rule. A protégé of Dr. Dre's who spent part of his youth in Detroit, he had to be better than the local black competition simply in order to be accepted—a fascinating inversion of the racism that many blacks have encountered in the workplace.

In the mid- and late eighties, as MTV began granting equal airtime to videos by black musicians, academia was developing a doctrine of racial sensitivity that also had a sobering effect on white musicians: political correctness. Dabbling in black song forms, new or old, could now be seen as an act of appropriation, minstrelsy, or co-optation. A political reading of art took root, ending an age of innocent—or, at least, guilt-free—pilfering. This wasn't a case of chickens coming home to roost. Rather, it was as though your parents had come home and turned on the lights.

I've spent much of my life playing music, and on and off since 1990 I've been a member of a funk band called Ui. We've had six members, all white, though most of the musicians who inspire our sound are black (the New Orleans band the Meters; several artists who played with Miles Davis in the seventies; various Jamaican rhythm sections) or are white bands heavily indebted to black music (Led Zeppelin, the German band Can). We released our first record in 1993—a vinyl EP available only in England, the first in a series of dubious marketing decisions—and the handful of reviews that it received were factually accurate, citing the bands I've mentioned as influences and recognizing that we were primarily interested in making instrumental funk, not in singing. The singing, what little there was, was my job, and it caused me to start thinking about musical miscegenation.

When we played our version of funk or dub reggae, or tried to make a synthesizer sound like a dolphin fixing a tractor (tough but doable), it felt natural. Most of our

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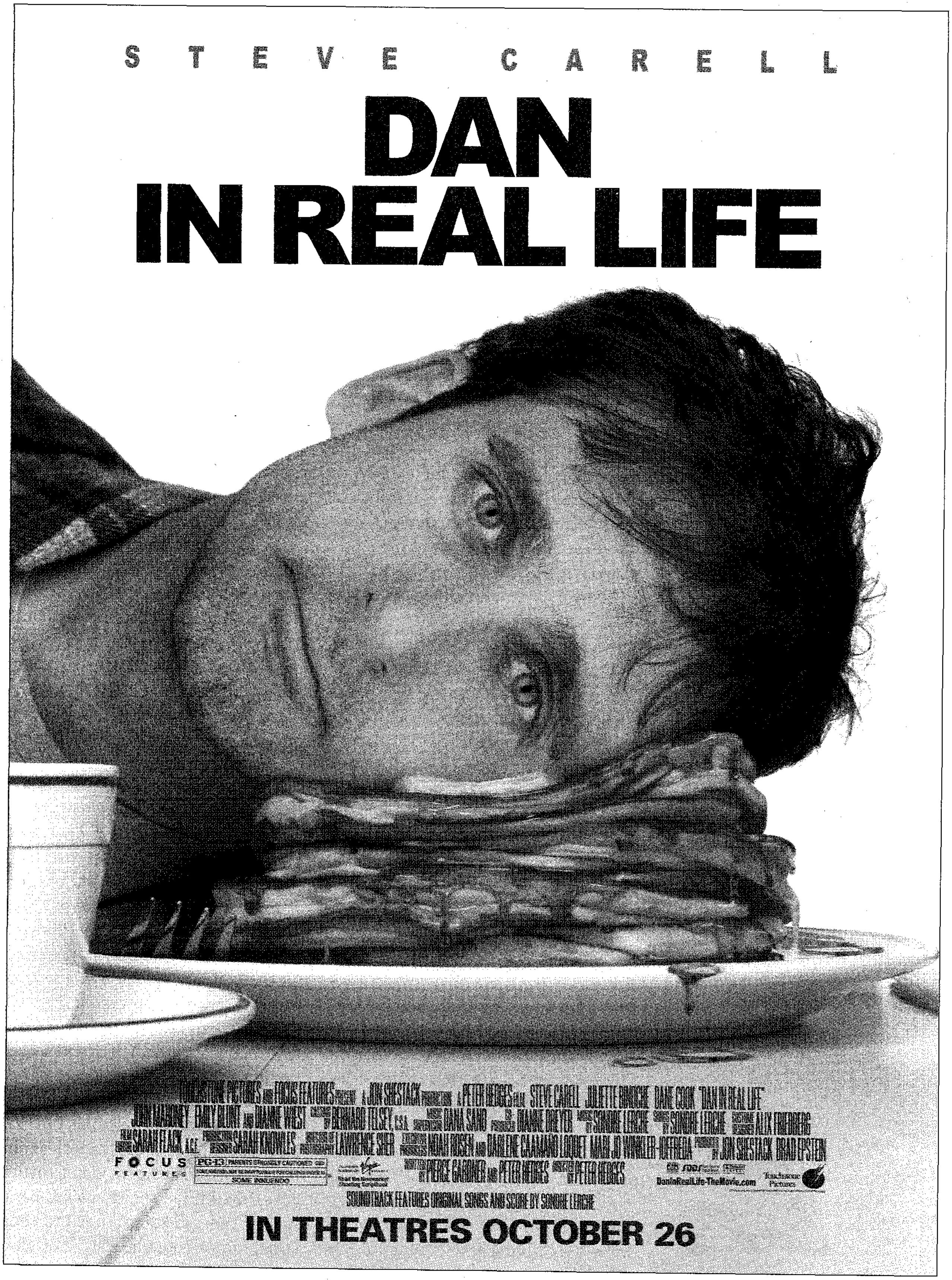

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music didn't require singing, but a few pieces needed the sound of a human voice to round them out. Yet singing stumped me. Except for a single, miraculous week when I was sixteen, I've never rapped successfully, and melodic singing was inappropriate for the jumpy, polyrhythmic music we played. So I fudged, splitting the difference between singing, chanting, and rapping, each time with diminishing returns. (I can hardly stand to listen to these tracks now.) And the problem was clearly related to race. It seemed silly to try to sound "black," but that is what happened, no matter how hard I tried not to. In some ways, this was the result of a categorical confusion, the assumption that if I could use my hands to play a derivation of black music with any authority I could use my voice to do the same thing. Playing black music never felt odd, but singing it—a more intimate gesture—seemed insulting. By the time we recorded our last album, in 2003, I had given up singing altogether. It had become clear to me that, to understate the case wildly, I lacked the ability of Mick Jagger and Prince and any number of other great rockers to fuse disparate traditions into a sound that was obviously related but unique—a true offspring.

Many indie bands seemed to be having complex reactions of their own to musical miscegenation. The indie genre emerged in the early eighties, in the wake of British bands such as the Clash and Public Image Ltd., and originally incorporated black sources, using them to produce a new music, characterized by brevity and force, and released on independent labels. The Minutemen, a group of working-class white musicians from San Pedro, California, who were influential in the late eighties, wrote frantic political rants that were simultaneously jazz, punk, and funk, without sounding like any of these genres. But by the mid-nineties black influences had begun to recede, sometimes drastically, and the term "indie rock" came implicitly to mean white rock. Pavement, a group that the *Village Voice* rock critic Robert Christgau, in 1997, called "the finest rock band of the nineties—by critical acclamation," embodied this trajectory. The band's first drummer, Gary Young, had a strong sense of swing and a solid backbeat (at least, when he managed to stay on his drum stool), but after his departure, in 1993, Pavement began producing a flat-footed mixture of shaggy, improvisational rock and sylvan curlicues taken from obscure folk groups.

During the same period, indie-band singers abandoned full-throated vocals and began to mumble and moan, and to hide their voices under noise. Lyrics became increasingly allusive and oblique. (From Pavement's 1995 song "Grave Architecture": "Am I just a bathtub waiting to be gripped or found on shady ground? And the lampshade's poised on the overwhelm. Drugs, and need the talent to breathe.") Several groups that experienced commercial success, such as the Flaming Lips and Wilco, drew on the whiter genres of the sixties—respectively, psychedelic music and country rock—and gradually Brian Wilson, of the Beach Boys, a tremendously gifted musician who had at best a tenuous link to American black music, became indie rock's muse. (Two currently popular indie acts, Panda Bear and Sufjan Stevens, are well schooled in Wilson's beatific, multi-tracked harmonies, which evoke the sound of glee clubs and church choirs.)

Wilco's 2002 album, "Yankee Hotel Foxtrot," which won that year's Pazz and Jop national critics' poll in the *Village Voice*, is one of the most celebrated indie-rock records of the past five years. (It was released on Nonesuch, which was a subsidiary of the major label Atlantic—further evidence that "indie rock" has become an aesthetic description, and no longer has anything to do with labels.) Wilco, which formed in 1994, was initially an alt-country band, whose songwriter, Jeff Tweedy, demonstrated a knack for writing clipped, vernacular descriptions of relationships and emotional states. The band's 1996 album, "Being There," is one of the few alt-country records that I play. It is indebted to a couple of readily identifiable sources—country (as the Rolling Stones played it) and bluegrass—and the music has a pleasing crackle. But after that Wilco and Tweedy, presumably under the influence of other indie bands, drifted from accessible songs toward atomization and noise. On "Yankee Hotel Foxtrot," the lyrics are embarrassing poetry laid over plodding rhythms. ("Tall buildings shake, voices escape singing sad, sad songs, tuned to chords strung down your cheeks.") The album

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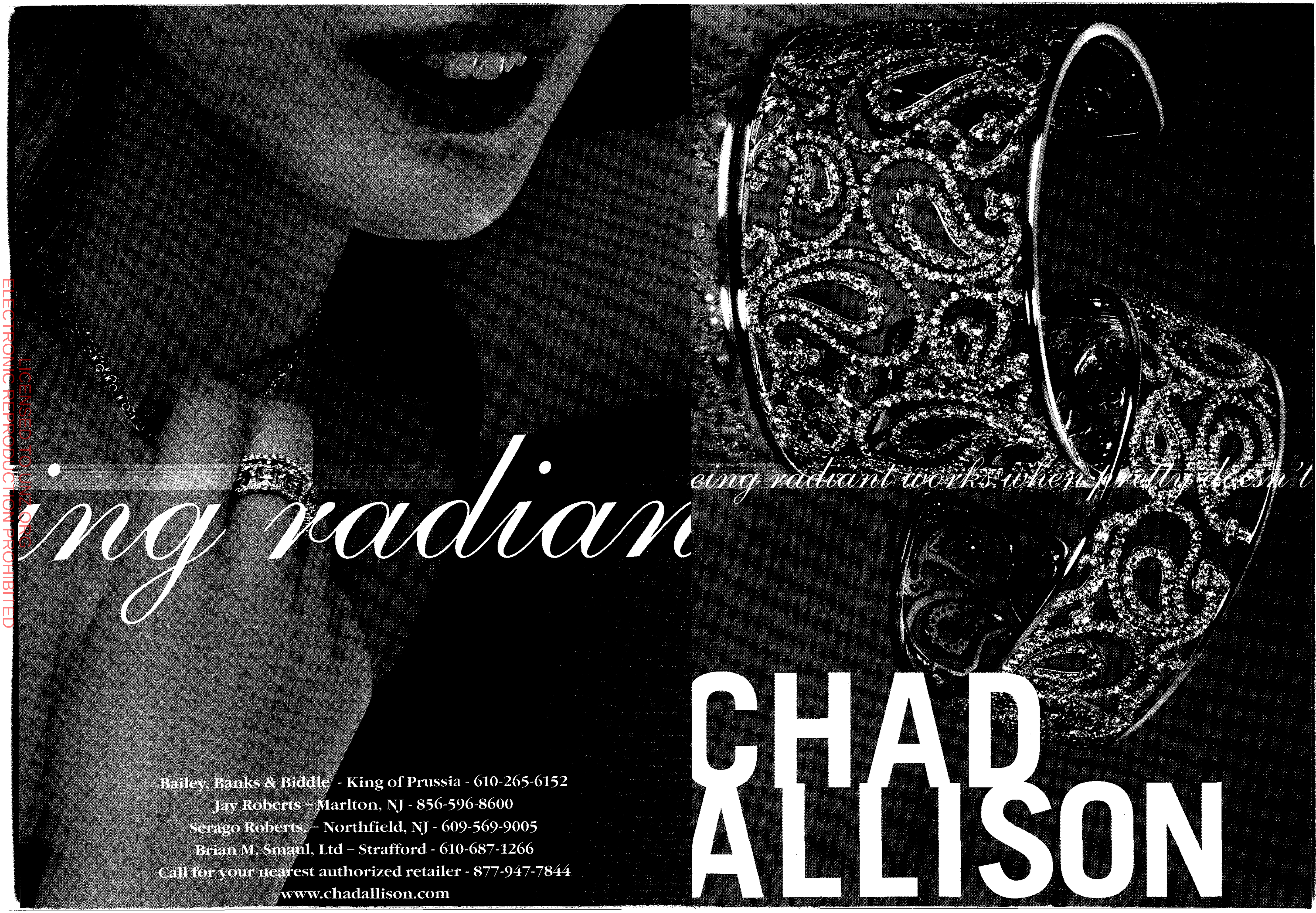
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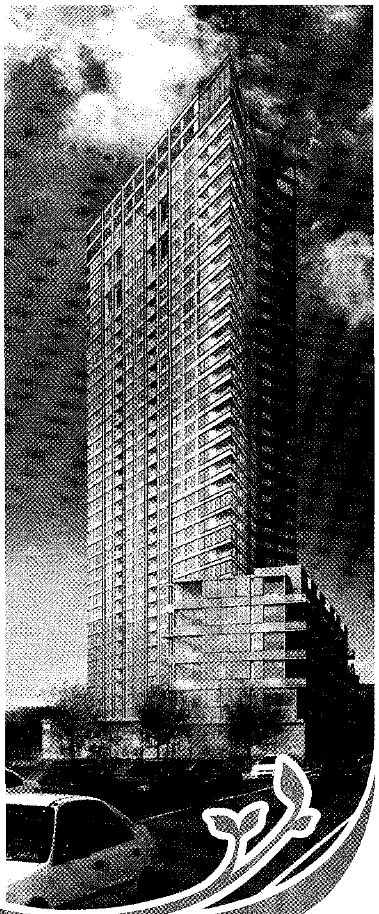

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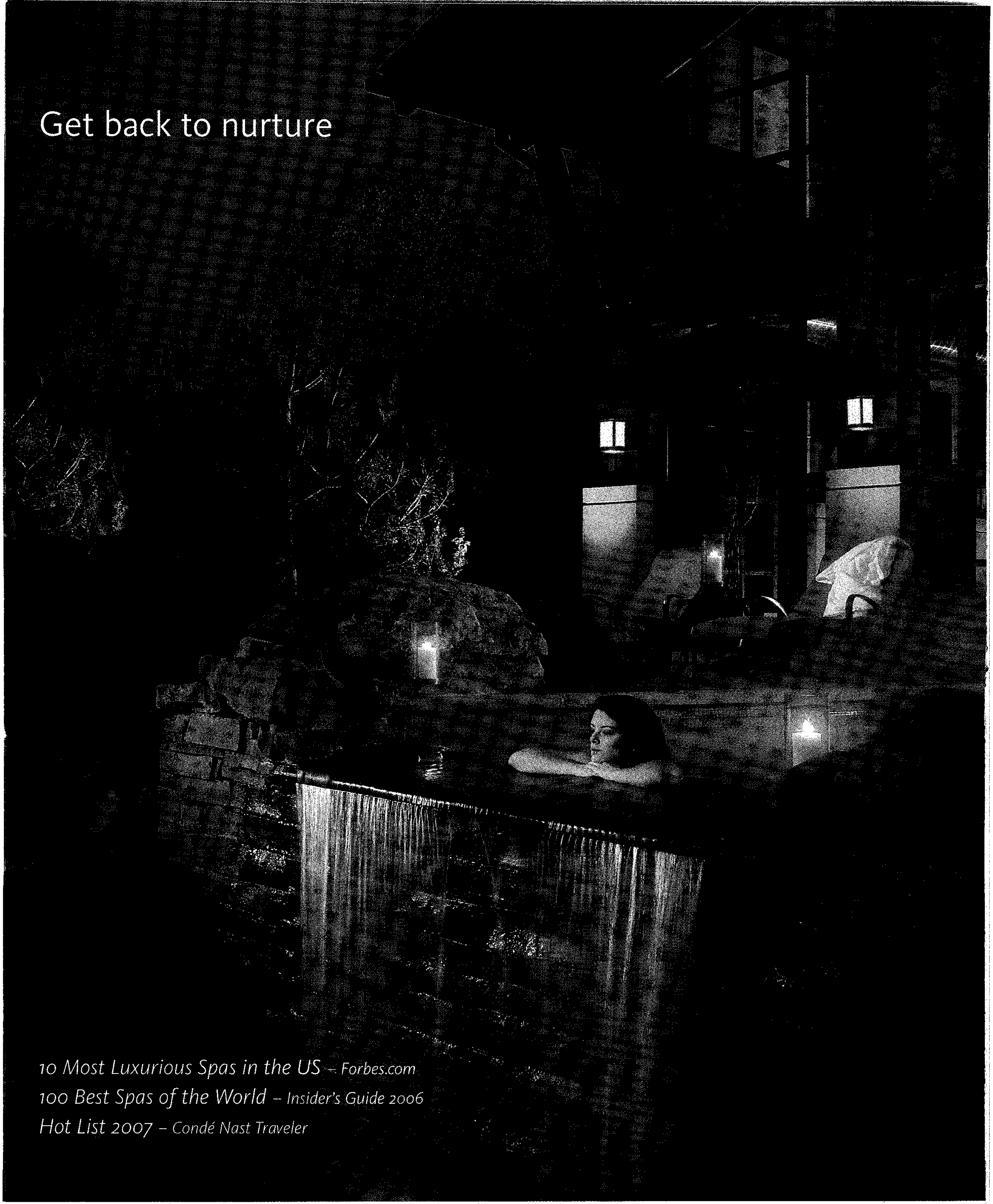
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Other flagship indie bands—the Fiery Furnaces, the Decemberists, the Shins—occasionally produce memorable hooks and moments of inspired juxtaposition. (The Fiery Furnaces have a constantly mutating lineup of instruments, which makes the band sound, at its best, like a jukebox on the fritz.) Grizzly Bear, the indie band that excites me most right now, is making songs with no apparent links to black American music—or any readily identifiable genre. (The band's sound suggests a group of eunuchs singing next to a music box on a sunken galleon.) But, in the past few years, I've spent too many evenings at indie concerts waiting in vain for vigor, for rhythm, for a musical effect that could justify all the preciousness.

How did rhythm come to be discounted in an art form that was born as a celebration of rhythm's possibilities? Where is the impulse to reach out to an audience—to entertain? I can imagine James Brown writing dull material. I can even imagine the Meters wearing out their fans by playing a little too long. But I can't imagine any of these musicians retreating inward and settling for the lassitude and monotony that so many indie acts seem to confuse with authenticity and significance.

The segregation occurred in both directions. Beginning in the late eighties, there were several high-profile lawsuits involving sampling. In 1991, a U.S. federal court ruled that the rapper Biz Markie's use on his album "I Need a Haircut" of a sample from a song by Gilbert O'Sullivan constituted willful infringement. (The album was withdrawn from stores and rereleased without the offending track.) A similar suit led to a decision by a federal appeals court, in 2004, that the use of even three notes from someone else's work could be a violation of copyright, making it difficult for all but the wealthiest rappers to use samples. For twenty years, beginning in the mid-eighties, with the advent of drum machines that could store brief digital excerpts of records, sampling had encouraged integration. (Think of De La Soul rhyming over an excerpt from the seventies educational cartoon series "Schoolhouse Rock!" or of Jay-Z rapping over a snippet from the Broadway musical "Annie.") In practice, the ruling obliged hip-hop producers to write their own music, which left them with a larger share of royalties. And, as producers became as powerful and as well known as rappers, having a distinctive sound that wasn't associated with another genre or artist became an asset. Rap musicians, lacking incentives to appropriate other sounds, began to stress regional differences instead: in Atlanta, the rugged, spare sound of crunk; in the Bay Area, the whizzing, burping, synthesizer-dominated sound of the hyphy movement.

The most important reason for the decline of musical miscegenation, however, is social progress. Black musicians are now as visible and as influential as white ones. They are granted the same media coverage, recording contracts, and concert bookings, a development that the Internet, along with dozens of new magazines and cable shows devoted to celebrities, has abetted by keeping pop stars constantly in the public eye. Even unheralded musicians don't need Led Zeppelin to bring their songs to the masses anymore: an obscure artist can find an audience simply by posting an MP3 on MySpace. The Internet, by democratizing access to music—anybody, anywhere can post or download a song on MySpace—has also made individual genres less significant. Pop music is no longer made of just a few musical traditions; it's a profusion of strands, most of which don't intersect, except, perhaps, when listeners click "shuffle" on their iPods. Last month, in the *Times*, the white folk rocker Devendra Banhart declared his admiration for R. Kelly's new R. & B. album "Double Up." Thirty years ago, Banhart might have attempted to imitate R. Kelly's perverse and feather-light soul. Now he's just a fan. The uneasy, and sometimes inappropriate, borrowings and imitations that set rock and roll in motion gave popular music a heat and an intensity that can't be duplicated today, and the loss isn't just musical; it's also about risk. Rock and roll was never a synonym for a polite handshake. If you've forgotten where the term came from, look it up. There's a reason the lights were off. ◆

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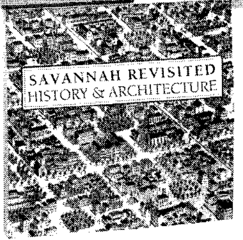
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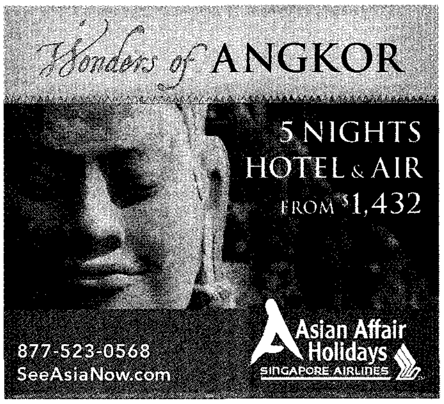
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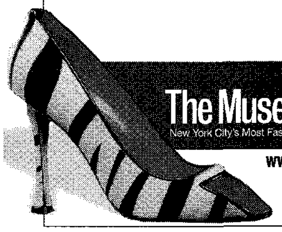
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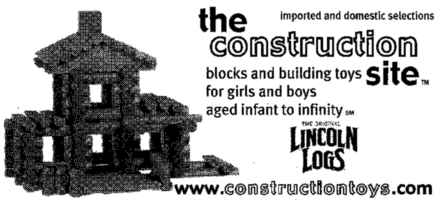
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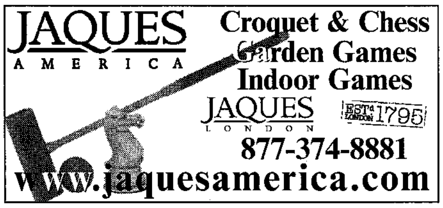
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THE THEATRE

LAY IT AS IT PLAYS

Trapped in the fun machine with Terrence McNally.

BY JOHN LAHR

In 1967, the year his boyfriend beat him to death with a hammer, the British playwright Joe Orton wrote "What the Butler Saw," a brilliant deconstruction of farce, which broadened the expressive boundaries of the genre, pushing it toward the kind of comedy that Ionesco called "a theatre of violence: violently comic, violently dramatic." "As I understood it," Orton wrote, "farce originally was very close to tragedy, and differed only in the *treatment* of its themes—themes like rape, bastardy, prostitution." His self-proclaimed theatrical mission in "What the Butler Saw" was to create "a seismic disturbance," using a traditional boulevard form to attack the audience's received opinions, especially about sexual identity. Homosexuality was, for the most part, decriminalized in England that year, but the bias against it was far from banished; Orton, in the vindictive spirit of his comedy, wanted to put it to the "norms," as he called them. While he was working on his new farce, he heard about the antics of the experimental group the Living Theatre, in America, and he made a note to hot it up. "Much more fucking and they'll be screaming hysterics in next to no time," he wrote.

"What the Butler Saw" was a comic watershed; its ambition and invention had an immediate influence on American playwriting, notably on John Guare's "The House of Blue Leaves" (1971) and on Terrence McNally's 1975 bathhouse farce, "The Ritz" (now in revival at Studio 54, under the uneven direction of Joe Mantello). "The Ritz," which was later turned into a movie by Richard Lester, was a hit. But, where Orton's humor had been dedicated to kicking down the walls of sexual discrimination, McNally's pre-AIDS romp, eight years later, was more or less pushing at an open door. By then, the love that could not speak its name was giddily shouting it across the footlights. The novelty of gay liberation—and the accompanying spectacle of pecs, poppers, and packages—is the only possible explanation for the original popularity of this lame show. "The Ritz," which is a cartoon of carnality, has all the external accoutrements of farce—doors, desperation, delusion. What it lacks almost completely (in addition to wit) is an internal design—the farce's madcap spiralling of rigorous logic, which carries both plot and personality to the point of disintegration. When the sight of a man in a towel holding a can of Crisco is what brings the house down, you know you're in trouble.

In the closeted past, the boundaries of respectability lent a sense of daring and delight to the wink of high camp. In Oscar Wilde's "The Importance of Being Earnest" (1895), for instance, the term "bunburying" sent a subversive message all its own to the Victorian *gayim.* Noël Coward, in "I Wonder What Happened to Him" (1944), a satirical song about pukka British military nostalgia, made the unacceptable irresistible, in a verse about a British officer leaving the Army in India, with the witty deployment of a single stressed adjective: "For apart from his mess bills exceeding his pay/He took to pig-sticking in *quite* the wrong way." Cole Porter's 1948 song "Tom, Dick, or Harry," from "Kiss Me Kate," even slipped a gay note into a heterosexual hymn of matrimony. "A dicka dick, a dicka dick/A dicka dick," the chorus sang. Once gender barriers began to break down and the taboos lifted, however, high camp lost some of its combative mischief. License bred laziness. "The Ritz" could be cited as Exhibit A.

The play opens at a family deathbed vigil. Old Man Vespucci (Teddy Coluca) is suffering, I guess, from Italian Alzheimer's: he has forgotten everything but his vendetta. "Get Proclo!" are his last words; Proclo (the charming Kevin Chamberlin) is his daughter's loving husband, whom he wants whacked. Why? There is no reason. There is no context. McNally merely catapults us into the middle of a maelstrom in which Proclo, the day after his father-in-law's funeral, takes a detour to a bathhouse—where he figures no macho Italian hit man will find him. (He's obviously an innocent.) We don't believe this premise or the people trapped in it for a second. Neither the audience nor the characters have anyplace to go—and the result is not tumult but almost instant tedium.

Perez and Chamberlin in "The Ritz." Photograph by Ethan Levitas.

Chamberlin, as Proclo, makes his first entrance into the bathhouse already disguised in an ungainly black wig and mustache. Chamberlin is heavyset, with small button eyes and a flat nasal delivery; he exudes a sweet bewilderment—a sort of Zero Mostel with a humble heart. Once inside Scott Pask's three-tiered set—a beehive of beefcake with a steam bath centered amid a score of numbered crimson hotel-room doors—Proclo is set upon by a series of sex-crazed boys and a deluded no-talent Latina singer, Googie Gomez (Rosie Perez), who in her own desperate struggle for success is prepared to believe that Proclo is a producer. That, unfortunately, is more or less the story.

McNally can only present the delirium of identity; he can't create it. In a real farce, the protagonist lies to save his skin; his duplicity multiplies by an arithmetic progression until he's driven almost out of his mind by self-consciousness. Proclo, however, has no identity to lose. While his character is simply a collection of attitudes, the other bathhouse patrons are a collection of appetites. Claude Perkins (Patrick Kerr), for instance, is a "chubby chaser"; he plies his trade with food. Chris (the hardworking Brooks Ashmanskas), a limp-wristed Virgil who guides Proclo through this circle of Hell, shouts "Orgy!" the way most people call "Waiter!" "I never forget a face," he says, looking at the backside of a passing hunk. He adds, "If I don't get laid at least twice a day, I go home and beat my dog." Except for the moment when Chris launches himself into the steam room—"Hello, everybody, my name is June! What's yours?"—that's just about as funny as the play gets.

Defeated by the structural challenges of the genre, McNally halts the soi-disant momentum of the play in order to stage Gomez's hapless cabaret act. (Since the story is going nowhere, the audience doesn't much mind the diversion.) Here, the dying embers of theatrical pleasure briefly glow. The audience doesn't care about McNally's characters, but it identifies deeply with the musicals that Perez expertly butchers. Though she is shoehorned into a racial stereotype so shallow that it makes Carmen Miranda look like Chekhov, Perez, when she sings, is allowed to resemble something closer to herself: feisty and full of fun, especially when you can understand what she's saying. The spectacle of her medley of Rodgers and Hammerstein and other hits—she loses her wig, then a shoe, among other gaffes—gives Joe Mantello the rare opportunity to make burlesque stage pictures that are both well timed and well worked. The rest, it gives me no pleasure to report, is travesty.

If you leave "The Ritz" wondering why anyone would revive something so retrograde, you leave Jenny Lyn Bader's "None of the Above" (at the Lion) wondering why anyone would write it at all. The play asks the question: Can Jamie (the fetching Halley Feiffer), a spoiled, precocious, emotionally starved Upper East Side teen-age slacker, raise her S.A.T. score to a perfect 2400? Unlike Jamie's always absent parents, Clark (Adam Green), the genius nerd who tutors her, actually sees her potential and, inevitably, falls in love with her. (He also has a weakness for gambling, and Jamie's perfect score on the College Boards would cancel his debts.)

The setup and the geography of this play are as familiar as a Pucci print. Bader has the kind of tart, cocky wit that can work a room, but its "Look, Ma, I'm dancing" quality plays less well onstage. She is smart, but not yet wise enough to choose depth over the desire to shine. Still, her dialogue is droll; it has attracted some vivacious young talent in Feiffer and Green, whom I'd happily pay to see again. Lauren Helpern designed Jamie's posh, shocking-pink pad, and the director, Julie Kramer, puts Bader's trick ponies efficiently through their paces. But, no matter how skillful the collaboration, "None of the Above" is less like a play than like an audition for the Disney Channel. ♦

THE SKY LINE

THE COLORIST

The playful world of Will Alsop.

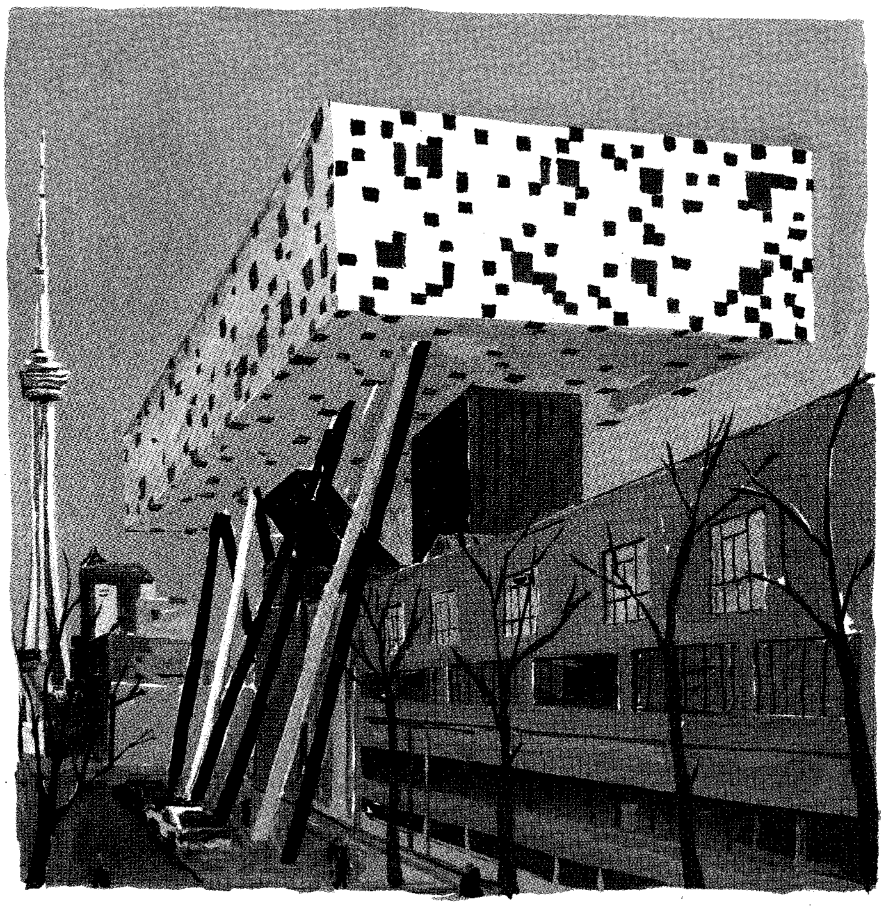
BY PAUL GOLDBERGER

It must be tough to be a British architect these days if your name isn't Norman Foster or Richard Rogers. The most famous British architects since Christopher Wren are filling the world with so many sleek glass-and-steel buildings that it can be hard for their compatriots to get noticed. All the more reason to enjoy the rise, in recent years, of Will Alsop. Alsop, now fifty-nine, is the anti-Foster. His buildings are startling, but also whimsical, gentle, colorful, and modest. Alsop's playfulness makes him unusual—wit is in short supply among architects today—but his work, on closer inspection, is just as notable for the commonsensical attitudes it embodies.

The building that has done most to establish Alsop as an international figure is a bizarre structure in Toronto, the Sharp Center for Design, at the Ontario College of Art & Design. It is a slab, two hundred and seventy feet long and raised nine stories into the air on huge, slanted legs. The legs—red and yellow and black and blue and purple and white—look like a bunch of gigantic colored pencils, or pick-up sticks mid-fall. The slab, which accommodates two floors of classrooms, studios, and offices, is covered in white corrugated metal and decorated with black squares. The building as a whole looks like a crossword puzzle on stilts. It seems to float above its surroundings, and locals have taken to calling it the Tabletop.

The most remarkable thing about the Sharp Center, however, isn't how strange it looks but how natural it begins to seem once you have spent some time with it. Alsop isn't trying to be cute, and there is logic to his zaniness. The college is housed in a row of low, undistinguished brick buildings, mostly from the nineteen-fifties and sixties, on a pleasant street in downtown Toronto, with a park behind it, a parking lot beside it, and an apartment block across the street. The new building was to occupy the parking lot, but the neighbors in the apartment block objected to losing their park views and the college was eager to avoid confrontation. Alsop met with the neighbors and someone suggested lifting the addition into the air to allow views under it. "I don't want to sound like some Communist here, but ordinary people do have some good ideas," he told me recently. "Architects left on their own can't break away from their preconceived notions."

To design a building that resembles a fancifully decorated tabletop but doesn't look ridiculous is no small accomplishment. Alsop's shrewdest move is the seemingly chaotic slant of the legs. These not only give the whole composition a sense of rhythmic movement but are also more efficient than vertical columns—which would have required extra bracing and might have made the slab seem dull and oppressive in a brutalist sort of way. Alsop has also taken care to relate the building to its neighbors. The elevated slab overhangs a portion of the old building as well as the former parking lot, where it serves as the roof over a new outdoor piazza for the school. ("We have built the world's most expensive umbrella," Gregory Woods, who manages Alsop's office in Toronto, told me.) The underside is covered with the same pattern of black and white squares as the sides. This is a crucial touch, engaging viewers with the mass above them: in a sense, the building's underbelly becomes its most important façade. Walking underneath, you feel as if you're in the presence of a gargantuan but benign Dalmatian.



The Sharp Center has reinvigorated the architectural culture of Toronto.

JEAN-PHILIPPE DELHOMME

The Sharp Center has upped the ante for architecture in Toronto, which has more often been defined by bland efficiency than by stylistic invention. Since Alsop's building opened, Toronto has got a new museum expansion by Daniel

Libeskind, and another, by Frank Gehry, is on the way. Alsop, who had never been to Toronto until he was interviewed for the Sharp job, now has so many other projects there that he has opened a branch office. Not since Philip Johnson's Pennzoil Place transformed Houston, more than thirty years ago, has a single building so invigorated the architectural culture of a city.

Until recently, Alsop had been considered something of a court jester among British architects. One London critic has accused him of "churning out dolly-mixture masterplans" and "crude indicative building designs in the form of a giant teddy bear or Marge Simpson's blue beehive hairdo," and occasionally the unconventional forms do start to seem over the top: the recent Blizard Building at Queen Mary, part of the University of London, features a two-story orange blob (containing a learning center) suspended in midair. But in 2000 Alsop won the Stirling Prize, Britain's most prestigious award for a new building, with a library of green glass in Peckham, South London, a portion of which, like the Sharp Center, is lifted high on thin, slanted columns. The award had the effect of validating Alsop's apparent eccentricity, making him appear as an heir to a great tradition of English mavericks—Nicholas Hawksmoor, John Soane, Edwin Lutyens—whose unconventional forms made for architecture of real humanity and emotional resonance.

Despite his fanciful tendencies, Alsop has no problem with constraints, and seems to work best when the limits of budgets and functional demands can serve as a counterweight to his hyperactive imagination. His second completed project in Toronto is a very modest one: a sales pavilion for a condominium developer. Alsop produced a three-story plywood box whose sides are punctuated by amoeba-shaped windows with frames in green, orange, yellow, white, black, and pink. These walls do double duty as giant billboards, with huge letters advertising lofts at nine hundred and ninety dollars a month. Slid into the big box like a car into a garage is the smaller box of the salesroom itself, which has a glass front, decorated with zig-zag stripes in black and white. Alsop, at heart, loves simple structures and likes to doll them up. His latest Toronto project, Filmport—the flagship building for a film-studio complex near the waterfront—is simply a long rectangle, but it curls up and forward like a wave. The front wall is glass and the back one, made of bright-red metal, has horizontal slots for windows. The end walls are dotted with more of the amoeba-shaped windows that are fast becoming an Alsop trademark.

Alsop has yet to build anything in the United States, but a few months ago he unveiled what could be his most striking design so far, a two-hundred-and-fifty-million-dollar mixed-use complex for a waterfront site in Yonkers. A developer wants to convert an abandoned power plant of the New York Central Railroad, an enormous, industrial castle dating from a century ago, a time when monumentality was routinely conferred upon even the most mundane civic structures. A little way north of the Riverdale section of the Bronx, the site commands superb views of the Hudson, but the wave of gentrification that has swept neighborhoods nearby has barely touched Yonkers. If Alsop's project goes ahead, that will certainly change. He has proposed putting twenty-five stories of rental apartments atop the plant, along with a wind turbine, replacing the two huge smokestacks with a tower whose bright colors and gauzy texture call to mind a patchwork quilt. An adjacent tower, with a base that resembles a silver skirt, would contain condominiums, as would portions of the power plant—which, if the design isn't toned down, could end up looking like a ruin in drag. The complex would also include an art museum, and it would be an easy boat trip from Manhattan. Alsop and the developer say that they intend to make the complex carbon-neutral. The apartments will have glass-enclosed winter gardens, and Alsop wants the river breezes to take the place of air-conditioning. "I'd like to think you could grow tomatoes in your apartment," he said.

"As I get older, I have developed a deep distrust of architectural theory," Alsop told me. "Imagination is the one thing that you have to have, but it has to be grounded in the people who live there." He paused for a moment. "I think I like people more than I do architecture, actually." ♦

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THE CURRENT CINEMA

NOCTURNES

“We Own the Night” and “Lust, Caution.”

BY ANTHONY LANE

As if to prove that some things never change, the best scene in “We Own the Night”—the best scene, indeed, to be found at the movies this year—is a car chase. It centers on a young night-club manager, Bobby Green (Joaquin Phoenix), who has helped the Brooklyn police to arrest a Russian drug czar named Nezhinski (Alex Veadov). Since then, Bobby has been a marked man, leading a desolate, nervy existence in motels with his girlfriend, Amada (Eva Mendes), under armed guard. Now they are being driven, through the drumming rain, from one safe location to the next; only the journey is unsafe. The beauty of the scene is that it meets the basic criteria of the genre—velocity and fear—while changing the rest of the rules. For one thing, we can barely make out what’s happening; instead of the sunlight that sharpened the vision of Steve McQueen in “Bullitt” or Gene Hackman in “The French Connection,” we get nothing but spray and blur, with the color washing out of the world. As the weather gods do their worst, the humans fare little better; Bobby is not a cop, not an action hero, and not much of a driver. A car pulls alongside, a gun opens fire, and Bobby’s driver slumps at the wheel. Bobby grabs it and panics, slewing across onto the wrong side of the road, and thus into the overwhelming question of the film: When fate comes barrelling toward you through the deluge, with its headlights on, what will save you? Your mettle, or your luck?

Wahlberg, Phoenix, and Mendes in James Gray’s “We Own the Night.”

TOM BACHTELL

“We Own the Night” was written and directed by James Gray, the maker of “Little Odessa” (1994) and “The Yards” (2000). On the evidence of the three films, you would never guess him to be under forty; he has none of that Tarantino-like urge to be cock of the walk—to preen one’s feathers and crow over the comedy of strong emotions. Rather, the Gray approach recalls the sombre, mirthless style of Alan J. Pakula or Sidney Lumet. “We Own the Night,” which is set in 1988, takes its title from an unofficial slogan of the N.Y.P.D. Street Crime Unit, but the words have the wise, weary flavor of a rebuke: of age telling youth to have its day and be done with it, because, Lord knows, the evening is closing in.

Hence the opening of the tale, which finds Bobby in his pomp, with a loud red shirt, a ring in his ear, and the tick-and-thud of Blondie’s “Heart of Glass” to back him up. He is a pirate captain in the last days of disco, caressing the delicious Amada in a private cabin above his club. What could go wrong? The answer lies with his family. He is not really a Green—that was his mother’s name. He was born Bobby Grusinsky, son of Burt (Robert Duvall) and brother of Joseph (Mark Wahlberg), both of whom are policemen, and neither of whom wants much to do with him. “How much did that earring set you back?” asks Burt, instantly casting Bobby as both dandy and spendthrift. On the other hand, passing through Bobby’s club, right under his nose—and up it, when he’s enjoying himself—is the product that is driving up the city’s crime rate. The folks who deal in it cannot be far behind. The very thing that splits Bobby from his loved ones, in other words, and feeds their moral contempt, is the hook that they can use to break the drug ring. And maybe, along the way, they can reclaim the prodigal son.

When Joseph is shot and injured, the embers of Bobby’s conscience begin to glow. By pretending to do a deal with Nezhinski, he leads the authorities to the Russian’s lair—an amazing place, church-quiet, where women sift cocaine into paper sachets as if they were telling rosaries. In truth, the entire movie breathes this air of secrecy and seclusion; it is as though all the characters, not just Bobby, were under some kind of witness protection, and you can’t help wishing that one of them—hero or villain, it doesn’t matter—could take a walk, stretch his legs, maybe go out to lunch. We are soon a long way from that red shirt, with its promise of partygoing, and Gray is running the risk that attends every pensive director: if you like to ponder people, in the half-light of their motivations, how do you stop your film itself from turning ponderous? Does the night get to own you, too?

I am not sure that Gray avoids the trap. It seems churlish to cavil at a director who has such a patient, brooding eye for urban loveliness; just look at the scene where Bobby beats up Jumbo

(Danny Hoch), a friendly, loose-tongued associate at the club. The fists fly, as they did in "The Yards," under an amberish darkness, and, once the damage is done, we switch to a dazzling long shot, with the two men dwarfed by a wall—pull back from a pair of squabblers, the camera suggests, and you cut their grand illusions down to size. The problem is, how many dimmings, and diminishings, can we take? Mark Wahlberg, for example, is low-key to the point of costive; maybe it's just my memory of "The Departed," where the rattling blueness of his language was the best thing in the picture, but here he seems drained and deënergized from the start, and, to be blunt, I never quite believed in him as Joaquin Phoenix's brother. The duty of the story is to bring them together, as Bobby sees the error of his ways, but what divides them isn't just their daily habits, or their attitude to drugs; it's their bone structure.

On the credible side, we get Robert Duvall. With Gene Hackman less in evidence today, Duvall has the field of the dominant older male, stiff-backed and unsurprisable, more or less to himself, and nobody but he could have allowed a patriarch as tough as Burt Grusinsky to soften, in his feelings toward a wayward child, without losing an ounce of his severity. After all, the setup of Gray's film (one father, two sons) is deliberately Biblical, and it's because of Duvall that the ancient archetype comes across as fitting instead of overblown. Gray would have been happiest, I guess, to make movies in the nineteen-seventies, and this one feels much closer to 1975 than to 1988; he could certainly use a seventies audience to watch his movies now—one that could be trusted not to grumble about his slow, unexcitable fades. So who better to promote that mood than Duvall, whose career rose on the steady rhythms of "The Godfather"? Whenever Gray throws in one of his wonderful down-the-corridor shots (he loves the unpredictable gloom that perspective affords), you immediately think of Brando and Pacino, half-hidden in their tenebrous offices, although even Coppola never summoned a sight as enticing as Eva Mendes, emerging from the shadows in a deep-red bustier, with smoke curling from her cigarette like a whisper. Moreover, when Coppola wanted water, or jungle, he had to go and find them, whereas the rain that drenches the car chase in "We Own the Night," and which lends the movie its full meaning—its strange sense of obscure, private apocalypse—wasn't there in the first place. The sequence was actually shot on a nice clear day, and the downpour was added later, drop by drop, through the magic of CGI. The gods, it turns out, no longer need to exist.

The new Ang Lee film, "Lust, Caution," is opening wide across the country, and I consider it my responsibility to give prospective viewers the information they require. And here it is: ninety-five. That is the number of minutes that elapsed, by my watch, between the start of the film and the start of the sex, and from that you can calculate your own schedule. Those who enjoy lush costume dramas, and consider them a relief from the obscenity that bedevils modern cinema, can get up and leave after an hour and a half, thus sparing themselves the first, aggressive ravishment, and crossing paths in the foyer with their incoming opposites—honest types who can't really enjoy a drama until the costume starts to come off.

The costume belongs to Wong Chia Chi (Tang Wei), one of a group of student actors who meet in Hong Kong in 1938 and, with the coming of war, hatch a subversive mission against the Japanese occupying powers. Wong is deputed to seduce Mr. Yee (Tony Leung), a senior Chinese official collaborating with the Japanese, the plan being that she will lure him to his death. Wong is a fervid moviegoer (she goes to see "Intermezzo" and "Penny Serenade"), and that seems odd, since anyone schooled in Hollywood melodrama knows that female spies *always* fall in love with their male targets. And so it proves, the difference in "Lust, Caution" being that Wong and Yee, far from tumbling into a genteel swoon, embark upon a series of difficult grapplings, all harsh breaths and awkwardly locked limbs. Afterward, they lie not in sprawling abandon but in a needy, fetal curl.

You have to admire what Lee is trying to do here. He must know his reputation for suavity—there is not an inelegant frame in the film—and he wants to test and roughen that decorum, as he did in "Brokeback Mountain," with the shock of his subject matter. That movie passed the test, whereas this one, running two hours and forty minutes, never finds the same balance: by the time he gets to the lust, it is too late to throw caution to the winds. ♦

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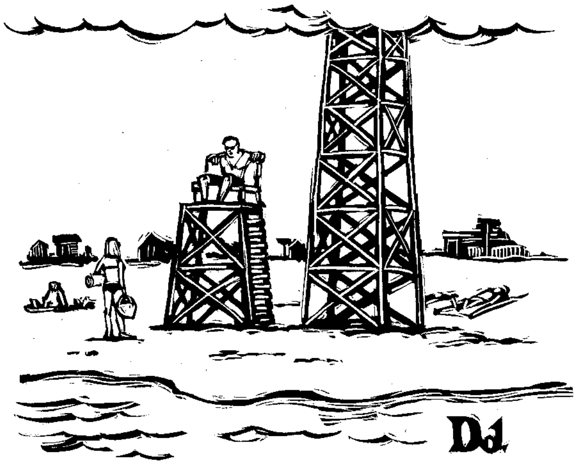
Ride-along enclosed in edition 66.

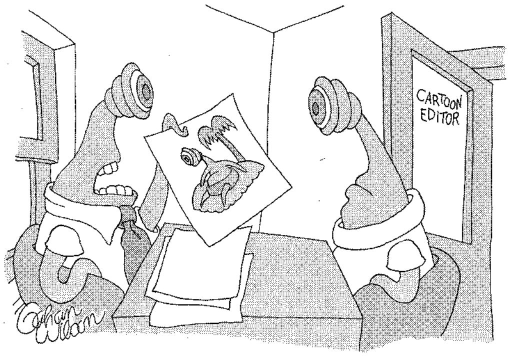
CARTOON CAPTION CONTEST

Each week, we provide a cartoon in need of a caption. You, the reader, submit a caption, we choose three finalists, and you vote for your favorite. Caption submissions for this week's cartoon, by Paul Noth, must be received by Sunday, October 21st. Finalists in the October 8th contest appear below; go online to vote. We will announce the winner, along with the finalists in this week's contest, in the November 5th issue. The winner will be given a signed print of the cartoon. Any U.S. resident age eighteen or over can enter or vote. To do so, and to read the complete rules, visit www.newyorker.com/captioncontest.

THE WINNING CAPTION



"He's the lifeguard during high tide."
Jennifer Shelly, New Braunfels, Texas



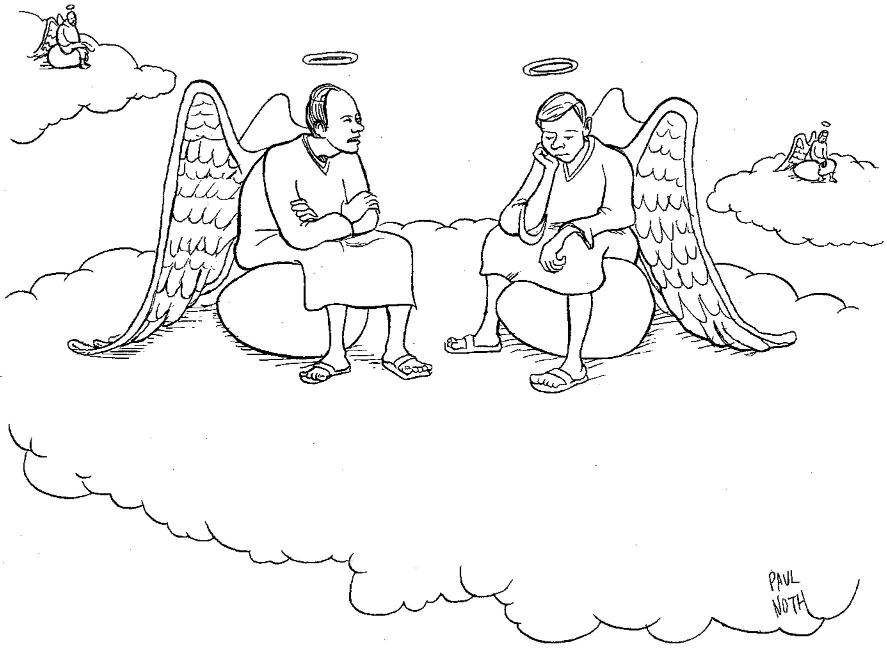
THE FINALISTS

"It would work better with an alien."
Don Hill, Corvallis, Ore.

"It's just not funny if she looks so sexy."
Randy Dreyfuss, Los Angeles, Calif.

"On what planet do you imagine this would be funny?"
Eva Liane Foster, Princeton, N.J.

THIS WEEK'S CONTEST



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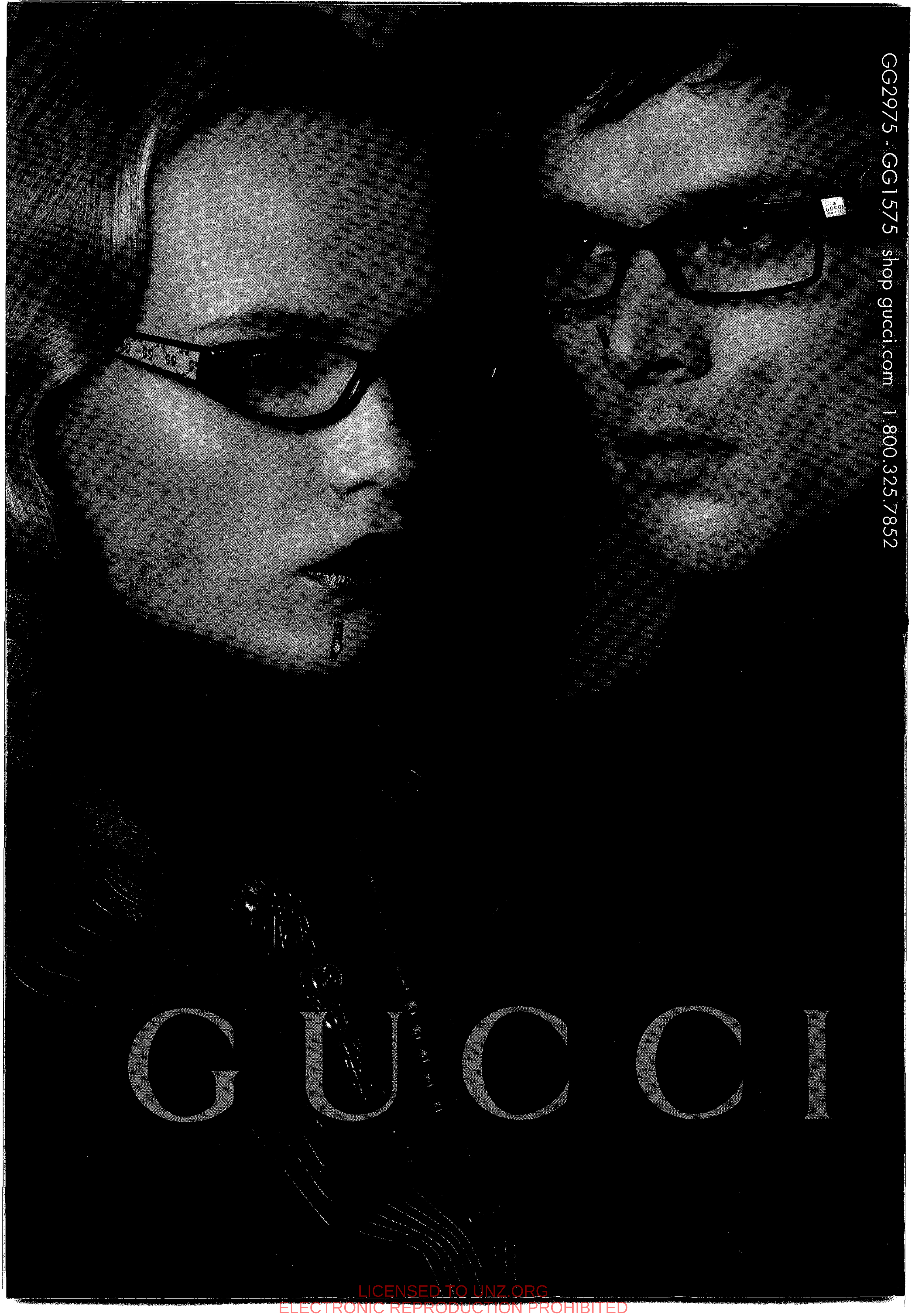
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